

Sharia Law undemocratic, says Benazir

ISLAMABAD, May 15: Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto condemned a controversial government-sponsored Islamic law on Tuesday as fundamentalist and undemocratic, reports Reuter.

Speaking in the National Assembly (Lower House of Parliament), she accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's six-month-old government of acting in haste to enforce the Islamic code of Sharia.

The opposition People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) Deputies had earlier marched out of the House when it began debating the Sharia Bill after Speaker Gohar Ayub Khan rejected their plea to wait until the evening to allow Bhutto to open the debate.

Bhutto called the bill a fundamentalist piece of legislation which "strikes at the very roots of democracy."

"It is un-Islamic, sectarian, unconstitutional and obscurantist," she said. "The PDA firmly believes that a fundamentalist bill cannot be accepted."

Sharif's eight-party Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) says it is fulfilling a pledge it made in last October's elections which it won.

The PDA and many liberal Muslims say the legislation, which declares Sharia to be Pakistan's "Supreme law", would strengthen fundamentalism and weaken Parliament.

On Monday, the IDA defeated opposition attempts to delay the bill for up to three months to allow time for public debate and for it to be scrutinised by an Islamic ideology council.

But State Law Minister Amir Husain accused the opposition of delaying tactics and said there had been enough public debate on the issue in the past few years.



CALCUTTA: Slogans and pictures in the chief minister, Mr Jyoti Basu's assembly constituency of Satgachia show Mr S. Ray of the Congress (I) trying to stage a comeback with a stungun and claws. Reference: crackdown on Naxalites when he was chief minister. Right: The Congress (I) depicts CPI (M) violence, showing Ms Mamata Bannerjee being attacked by cadres. Message: under Mr Basu, law and order has broken down.

30m voters urged to teach Karunanidhi a lesson Jayalalitha still riding the crest of MGR charisma

NEW DELHI, May 15: A former cinema heartthrob is riding on the charisma of a male star-turned-politician who died four years ago in her race for power in India's Tamil Nadu state, reports AFP.

Spinster Jayalalitha Jayaram, 43, has the magic word "MGR" on her lips all along her daunting 5,650-kilometre (3,530-mile) campaign trail for the May 26 election in the southern province of 55 million.

They are the initials of MG. Ramachandran, the Tamil movie actor of unprecedented following who was the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister for 10 long years until his death in December 1987.

MGR had stormed to power by capitalising on his larger-than-life image as a Robin Hood figure that he carefully built over a three-decade career spanning some 235 movies, many of them blockbusters.

MS Jayalalitha was his leading lady in some of them 28 of which are running to packed houses now in Tamil Nadu, and was groomed by him in the murky world of Indian politics which she plunged into in 1982.

"Jayalalitha is the reflected glory of MGR," noted film critic Amita Malik said here, commenting on the ex-actress' power drive that has left her seasoned opponents stunned.

But the former MP also has her own charisma and oratory which she uses to good effect to draw the thousands of star-struck, mostly rural folk to her rallies as she promises a return to MGR's era, news reports said.

To cap it, her All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party has formed an alliance with former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (I) that is seen as

capable of capturing the 294-seat Tamil Nadu legislature.

"Ours will be a government of compassion," she told the Hindu newspaper, published from the Tamil Nadu capital Madras. "We want to bring back an era of peace and stability."

Like MGR, she is accused of "bossism," of alienating party chiefs and handpicking her party's 166 candidates in a bid to ensure complete personal loyalty from the future lawmakers.

The nominees are more than grateful, and many publicly prostrate themselves before her at crowded election meetings, knowing that just a nod from Jayalalitha can swing hundreds of votes their way.

Such is the mass adulation that crowds wait for hours for a fleeting glimpse of the now-slightly overweight ex-actress as she passes through dusty villages in a 20-vehicle convoy, flanked by police and armed guards.

Even the Congress (I)'s 66 candidates expect MS. Jayalalitha, not Gandhi, to deliver the goods.

So no one is surprised to hear the Queen of nearly 115 movies already talking like a chief minister about Tamil Nadu's development, of solar energy and the Tamil Ethnic Unrest in neighbouring Sri Lanka.



Jayalalitha

India involved in kidnapping of 3 Chinese engrs: Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, May 15: A senior Pakistani official said on Tuesday he thought India could be involved in recent kidnappings of foreigners in southern Pakistan, reports Reuter.

"The enemies of Pakistan are kidnapping foreigners," Sind Province Chief Minister Jam Sadio Ali told reporters. "May be some country like India is involved."

He said while commenting on the kidnapping last Saturday of three Chinese engineers in the Sind district of Dadu.

Pakistan and India have fought three wars since their independence from Britain in 1947 and have often accused each other of subversion.

Pakistani officials privately say India is interested in destabilising Sind province, which borders its Rajasthan state, and of helping the secessionist Jiy Sind movement.

Three Japanese students were kidnapped in March and freed 44 days later. A kidnapped Swedish engineer was killed last month in a gunbattle between bandits and police.

US working on ME arms cut plan

WASHINGTON, May 15: President George Bush said on Tuesday the United States was working on a Middle East arms control plan but declined to confirm that it would keep Israel from making nuclear arms components and force Arab states to give up chemical weapons, reports Reuter.

"We're in the process of working out this arms control problem and I'm not prepared to give any details on it today at all. But there are all kinds of options out there," Bush said.

at a hastily arranged White House news conference called to announce his nomination of Robert Gates to be CIA Director. Bush also cautioned against undue optimism or pessimism about US peace efforts in the region.

Suu Kyi ordered not to leave Burma

RANGOON, May 15: Burma's ruling junta made a surprising public appeal yesterday to Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for almost two years, to leave the country and rejoin her family in England, reports AFP.

The unexpected plea to the 45-year-old driving force behind the National League for Democracy (NLD), landslide winners of the 1990 May elections, to quit Burma came from Major-General Khin Nyunt, head of the country's military intelligence.

"I would like to say that the best way for Suu Kyi is to leave here and go back to her family," said the Major-General during a three hour press conference.

His remarks come less than a month after sources in Bangkok revealed that Maj. Gen. Khin Nyunt had sent a

Buddhist about to try and strike a deal with Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi to leave Burma.

According to the sources, the Oxford educated mother of two whose husband is British academic Michael Aris agreed to leave but set certain conditions, including the release of hundreds of political prisoners and the transfer of power to a civilian government, which she knew the military would never accept.

Maj. Gen. Khin Nyunt said at the press conference that Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi had been forced into the forefront of politics by both leftist and rightist elements.

He accused "power hungry" politicians of leading her along the "path of confrontation with the military." He said that for her own safety and for national security reasons the junta had to put her under protective custody.

His appeal came as the government, in what was seen as a major sign of confidence, reopened universities which had been hotbeds of a revolt against Burma's military authorities in 1988 when Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi came to na-

tional prominence. Last month the NLD announced it had axed Aung San Suu Kyi from its executive committee after mounting pressure from the junta, effectively removing her from any official political position.

Shintaro Abe dead

TOKYO, May 15: Senior Japanese politician Shintaro Abe, who had been a top-running candidate to succeed Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, died this morning, public television NHK reported, says Reuter.

The former Foreign Minister, who underwent gallstone surgery in 1989, was last seen in public at a lunch for Soviet President Gorbachev during his visit to Japan last month.

Former Premier Noboru Takeshita was reported to have said of Abe, 67, leader of the second-largest faction in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). He is the man whom I would like to see as the Prime Minister."

Successor of CIA Director nominated

WASHINGTON, May 15: President George Bush Tuesday nominated his Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates to succeed William Webster as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), reports AFP.

Gates served as Deputy CIA Director in the former administration of President Ronald Reagan, who nominated him for the post of director in 1987 but later withdrew that choice amid controversy over Gate's role in the Iran-Contra affair.

Gates, 45, is a Soviet specialist and long-time CIA employee.

"He's a good man and I'm proud to send his name" to the Senate for confirmation, Bush said in announcing the nomination at a White House press conference.

"I have no qualms at all about Gates' nomination and chances for confirmation, Bush said in a reference to the controversy over Gates' nomination in 1987 when the then Director William Casey died of a brain tumor.

"This matter's been investigated over and over again... and if I was worried about reopening Iran-Contra then I would not have nominated him for the job, he said.

'Shekhar hindering SAARC growth'

NEW DELHI, May 15: The Pakistan High Commissioner, Abdul Sattar, Monday said anti-Pakistan statements over the past few days did not inspire a great deal of optimism for strengthening SAARC cooperation, reports PTI.

In an apparent reference to the Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar's strong statements asking Pakistan to stop border intrusion, Sattar said he saw too many obstacles hindering the growth of SAARC cooperation.

Sattar was speaking at the launching of a society for the people's initiative for South Asia Cooperation at India International Centre here. There were less than 70 participants at the inaugural function.

He referred to east-west detente and expressed concern over the marginalisation of the South Asian region.

The seven SAARC member-states together counted for less than one per cent of in-

ternational trade at a time when economy had taken the front seat in the conduct of international relations, Sattar said.

The society was launched with KM Srivastava, an archaeologist, as chairman.

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner, Kanakratne, felt that the SAARC should avoid doing too many things in too short a time.

The SAARC should learn from other's mistakes. Unfortunately, the regional grouping was committing the same mistakes, he regretted.

Kanakratne favoured freer travel among SAARC member-nations and called for ending "bureaucratic nonsense" in the grant of visas.

With democracy returning to Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, the time was propitious for forging closer cooperation among the SAARC members, he said.

BRIEFLY

Meet on control of cholera: Health ministers from Brazil, Colombia and Peru will gather in a northeastern Amazonian town in Peru Thursday to find ways to combat the cholera epidemic, AFP reports from Lima.

Plea to probe killings of editors: The International Press Institute (IPI) called on the Philippine Government on Tuesday to investigate the recent killings of two newspaper editors, Reuter reports from London.

US envoy to UN named: President George Bush said Tuesday he will nominate State Department official J. Stapleton Roy as ambassador to China, AP reports from Washington.

Senate asked to ratify chemicals ban accord: President George Bush asked the Senate on Tuesday to ratify a treaty banning chemicals that deplete the Earth's protective ozone layer by the year 2000, AP reports from Washington.

Palestinian hacked to death: Masked assailants late Tuesday beat a Palestinian man to death in the occupied Gaza Strip, Palestinian sources said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Sino-Soviet border accord likely: Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin said Wednesday he expects to sign a partial border agreement with the Soviets during his four-day visit, AP reports from Beijing.

Soviet FM meets Arafat: Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh met in Geneva late Tuesday with Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman Yasser Arafat for talks on the current US-Soviet attempt to get a Middle East peace conference off the ground, AFP reports from Geneva.

Lankan local council poll fair: observers

COLOMBO, May 15: A team of international observers said on Tuesday that last weekend's local council elections in Sri Lanka were fair and free, reports Reuter.

US working on ME arms cut plan

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Elizabeth takes hot, humid US by storm

WASHINGTON, May 15: Britain's Queen Elizabeth Tuesday took a hot and humid Washington by storm on the first day of a state visit expected to highlight equally warm relations between Britain and the United States, reports AFP.

After a colourful five-and-a-half day drum corps decked out in revolution era uniforms marched across the White House lawn and cannons roared to greet Queen Elizabeth and her husband Prince Philip, President George Bush underscored the "special relationship" between the two countries.

Despite sweltering heat and high humidity, some 4,000 people attended the welcoming ceremony, including Vice President Dan Quayle and General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a broad sampling of Washington society.

Bush praised U. S.-British cooperation saying: "Today our alliance has perhaps never been stronger. For evidence, look to the sands and seas of the Persian Gulf."

"We linked hands" and hearts in the Gulf to do what was right and good," Bush said, praising "Britain's help and leadership" in forging the alliance which forced Iraqi troops out of occupied Kuwait and the combative spirit of the desert rats.

Off the Record

'Baby, Baby'

NASHVILLE (Tennessee): Amy Grant says having her single 'Baby Baby' at the top of the pop charts for two weeks doesn't get the laundry done, reports AP.

"After it went No. 1, I said, what did I don't wake up to clean laundry? This doesn't magically clean the house?" the singer said.

"There's one level that's so exhilarating, and at the same time, day-to-day life is exactly the same. And I wouldn't want it to be any other way really," the mother of two said.

"Baby Baby" is the first single from her album 'Heart in Motion'. The former gospel star said she knew the song would be a smash the first time she heard the music by Keith Thomas. She wrote the lyrics.

"You can just hear a song sometimes and know, especially when it's as unique as this one," Grant said.

'Dances With Wolves'

BOISE, (Idaho): Environmentalists against a wolf-recovery proposal for the northern Rockies have enlisted the support of Michael Blake, author of the book 'Dances With Wolves', which he adapted into an Oscar-winning screenplay, reports AP.

He attended a news conference at which conservationists contended the proposed reintroduction plan would allow ranchers to shoot wolves at will and weaken the Endangered Species Act.

"I'm here because I'm disturbed the wolf could be taken off the endangered species list," Blake said Monday.

"This is another example of a US policy declaring war on animals. Idaho is a unique, special state with many special people and special lifestyles. You could show leadership and take a stand in recovery of the wolf."



WASHINGTON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth (C) and US President George Bush (R) are escorted across the White House grounds May 14 during a formal welcoming ceremony for the Queen and her husband Prince Philip. The royal couple are on a 10-day state visit to the United States. — AFP Photo