

**Shevardnadze keen to become UN Secy-Gen**

MOSCOW, May 16: Eduard Shevardnadze, former Soviet Foreign Minister, whose name is associated with a new way of thinking in Soviet foreign policy, stated in an interview with the newspaper Bild Am Sonntag that he might give his consent to be nominated to the post of UN Secretary-General, reports IAN.

But he has advanced two "ifs" if such a proposal is made to him and if the present Secretary-General, Perez de Cuellar, who has worked in this capacity already for two terms, does not run for the post again.

In January, Perez de Cuellar announced his intention to leave the post at the end of the year. Since that will be the tenth and the last year of 71-year-old Perez de Cuellar on this post, the 15 members of the Security Council will have to nominate their candidate who will have to be approved later by representatives of 159 nations, members of the General Assembly.

By autumn the name of the candidate will have to be known apart from prestige and moral authority, the post gives 183,000 dollars a year. This explains the passions in connection with this post which will soon grow hot.

Speaking of the changes of Shevardnadze for being nominated to this post, one should bear in mind that the five permanent members of the Security Council possessing the right of veto — the USSR, the USA, China, Great Britain and France — usually evaded nominating candidates from their countries. According to the procedure, they have to come to a mutually acceptable agreement.

Muslim voters to look for secular candidates

Indian parties woo Muslims

NEW DELHI, May 16: India's major political parties are feverishly wooing millions of Muslim voters who may end up playing a major role in deciding who takes the front seat in general elections only three days away, reports AFP.

Party stalwarts on eleven-hour campaign trails are making desperate appeals and doling out promises to the 100-million-strong community against the backdrop of a Hindu wave that threatens serious upsets in the balloting.

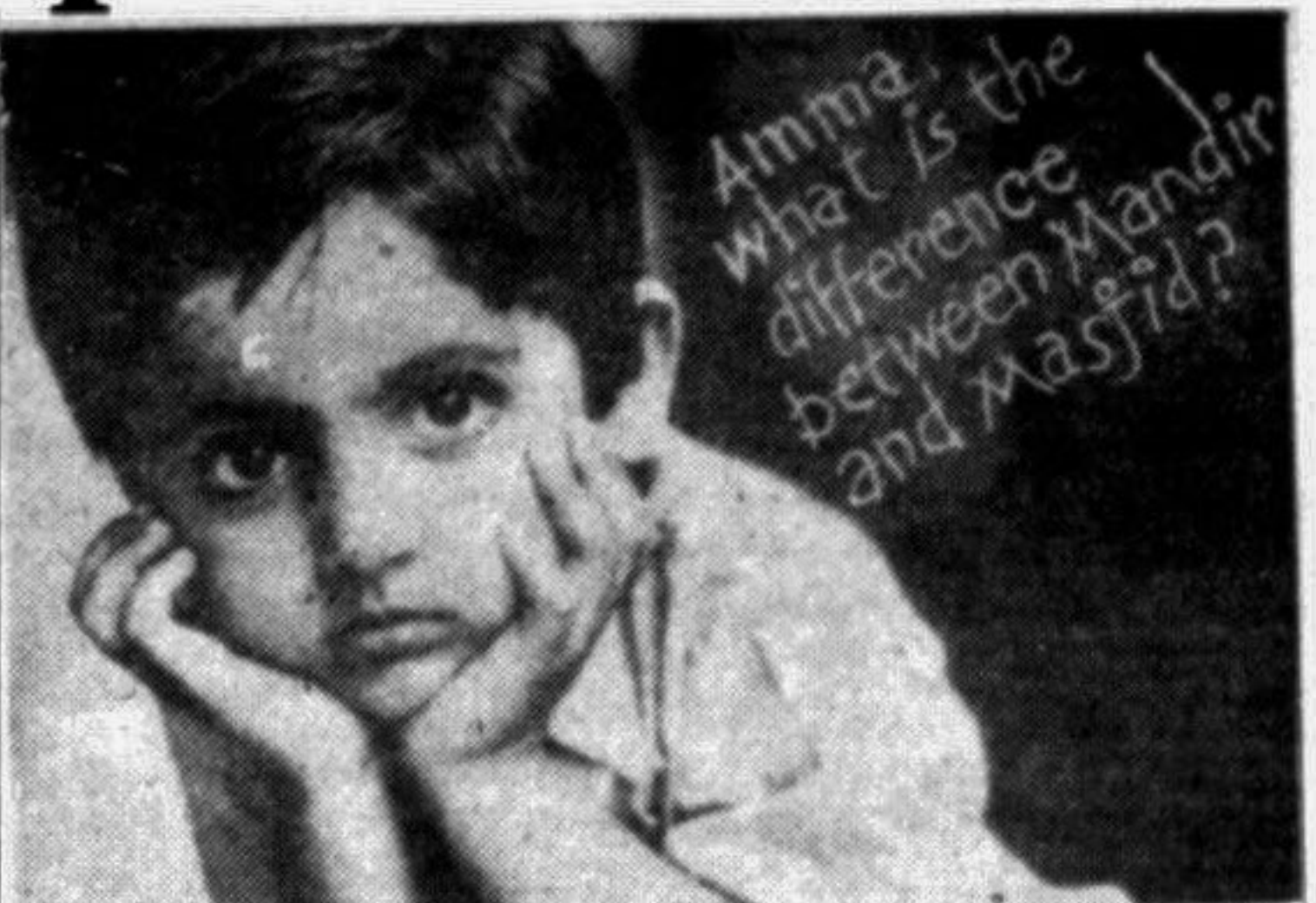
Muslim leaders say the unprecedented Hindu fervour being injected into the hectic campaign is bound to trigger a Muslim backlash in favour of those capable of humbling Hindu fundamentalist nominees.

"Muslims will look everywhere for secular candidates," said Javed Habib, a noted Muslim leader here. "Local favours will definitely play a role in helping them decide who they should vote for."

Muslims leaders say if the community votes en-bloc, it can make or break candidates in dozens of constituencies, a worrisome prospect for the three main contenders in the May 20-23-26 nation-wide polls to federal parliament.

Poll analyst G Ramachandran said it was a myth that Muslims vote en-bloc but added that the powerful Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) decision to stand on a brazen Hindu platform may change the scenario.

"They (Muslims) might do mass voting this time," he said in an interview. "If there are two strong candidates aiming to defeat the BJP in a constituency, they might go for one who they think is stronger."



CONGRESS (I) BELIEVES THAT ALL RELIGIONS ARE EQUAL AND ONLY A STABLE GOVERNMENT CAN ENSURE PEACE AND HARMONY.

VOTE STABILITY

VOTE CONGRESS (I)

NEW DELHI — A poster of Congress (I) portrays a child as saying: 'Amma, what is the difference between Mandir and Masjid.'

Muslims constitute Hindu-majority India's largest religious minority.

In the forefront of the battle for Muslim votes is the Congress (I) Party led by former Premier Rajiv Gandhi, 47, and the National Front of his successor Vishwanath Pratap Singh, 60, who has an alliance with communists.

Already, Muslim religious leaders have jumped into the fray, urging the community to vote one way or another, and newspapers say even the BJP is making subtle appeals to contain possible electoral damage.

At the core of the Muslim concern is a crumbling 16th century mosque in the town of Ayodhya, some 700 kilometers (440 miles) east of here, which the BJP wants replaced with a temple to the Hindu god Rama.

Hindu groups, which have thrown thousands of committed cadres behind the BJP, say the Ayodhya mosque was built by Muslim Emperor Babar on the ruins of a Rama shrine he destroyed. Muslims deny this.

The emotive issue has triggered scores of bloody Hindu-Muslim riots, and sparked the collapse of VP Singh's government in November after the BJP withdrew its legislative support.

Today, V P Singh emphasises at all his election meetings, which newspapers say attract hundreds of Muslims that he "sacrificed" his government but did not let the Ayodhya mosque fall. Undoubtedly, it has already won him a sizeable Muslim constituency.

But V P Singh, who is also banking on the votes of backward caste Hindus with promises of job quotas, is not complacent, and loses no opportunity to show off his secular credentials.

On Monday, a mosque loud-speaker began blaring afternoon prayers while V P Singh was addressing a wayside meeting in the town of Akbarpur in northern India. He stopped immediately and said for all to hear, "Let the prayer be over."

Tuesday the students union in the century-old and highly respected Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) asked Muslims to cast their ballots in favour of National Front and Communist candidates.

Ashok Mitra returning to state politics

CALCUTTA, May 15: The former West Bengal Chief Minister and the president of the Pradesh Congress (I), takes on Marxist intellectual, Dr Ashok Mitra in the prestigious Chowringhee Assembly seat, returning to the vortex of state politics after 14 years, barring in 1984 and '85, reports PTI.

He had electoral drubbing in the successive years in Darjeeling and Bolepur Lok Sabha constituencies as an independent candidate by the CPI (M).

Dr Mitra, a former Finance Minister of the state, also stages a comeback to electoral politics after quite a few years to what he termed, "vanquish Mr Ray," whom he described as the "embodiment of emergency excess" in West Bengal during his tenure as Chief Minister.

In the pages of history, Siddhartha and Ashok renounced their kingly life in quest of the ultimate truth, but here in Chowringhee, their modern namesakes after lapse of centuries "pledge to finish the other" in the poll battle that has become the cynosure of all eyes, crossing the limits of the state.

However, the mood of the electorate, which had returned Congress (I) candidates unflinching, barring a solitary exception in 1977, is a subdued one. It keeps one guessing.

As a voter puts it "either way does it make difference I have a mind not to cast a vote at all."

Off the Record

New salon offers topless cutters

ADELAIDE: A little off the top has taken on a whole new meaning at Fiona's Mensworld Hair Design, reports AP.

The suburban hairdressing salon switched to topless women stylists Thursday morning and reported business was booming. The two women on duty are being paid about triple the going industry rate, while the haircuts — at about 15 US dollars each — are above average in cost but not exorbitant.

The service is only available to adults, and a strict hands-off will be enforced, said a saloon spokesman, who asked not to be identified.

He said the salon decided to go topless to help it survive during tough economic times.

"It's a novelty but I think it's going to work," he said.

"There's topless restaurants and topless bars so why not topless hair salons?"

The salon has angered the local Hairdressers and Cosmetologists Employers' Association, which claimed it would degrade the industry.



WASHINGTON: Alice Frazier breaks away from protocol and hugs Queen Elizabeth II May 15. The queen was visiting Frazier's home at Drakes Place, a housing project in Washington. —APF photo

Elizabeth carries her own umbrella

WASHINGTON: Reporters covering the visit of Britain's Queen Elizabeth in news-mad Washington face a special challenge — no news is likely to occur, reports Reuter.

So in the nation's capital, where the journalistic scoop is king, trivia tends to take centre stage and any titbit will do.

— Queen Elizabeth carries her own umbrella.

— She gave US President George Bush silver horse shoes and a book entitled "Lost America."

— She wore a purple-and-white hat to the White House.

Reporters were right on top of the purple hat caper.

The hat was all that most people saw when the Queen made brief remarks on the White House lawn on Tuesday. Her diminutive face was obscured by its brim and the microphone.

The Queen's umbrella, a nondescript black number with a least one bent rib, was on display at Arlington National Cemetery where she placed a wreath at the tomb of the unknowns.

To get set for this minutes-long, afternoon event reporters and photographers had been in place since mid-morning on one of the hot, humid days that remind Washingtonians that their city is built on a southern swamp.

Sweat dripped from faces and dampened shirt fronts, and those who had brought umbrellas used them as parasols.

"After today, I'm going to join the IRA," one US reporter said.

He was joking, but a Buckingham Palace official said the anti-British Irish Republican Army is expected to demonstrate at some time during the Queen's visit.

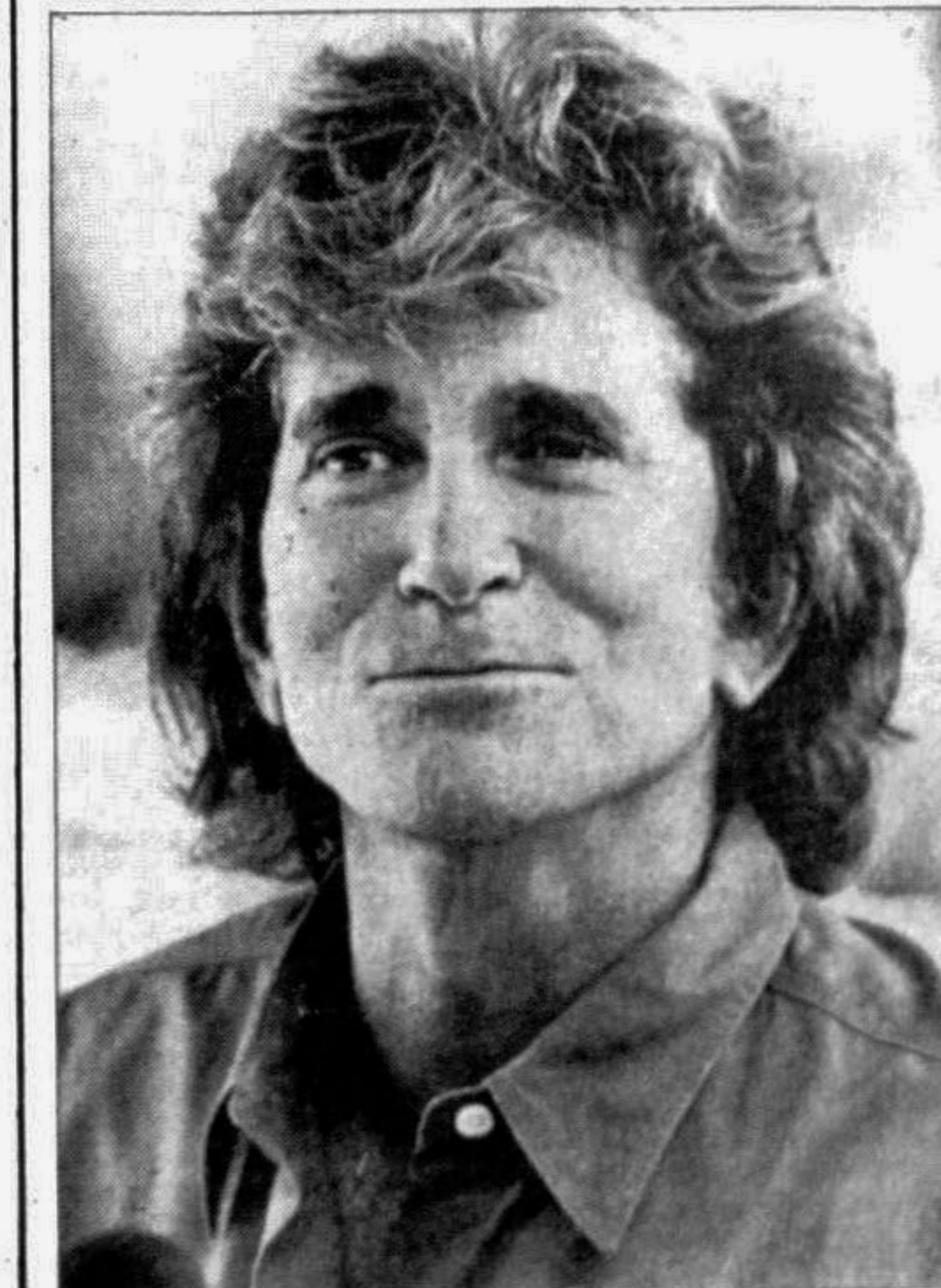
Highest honour for Schwarzkof — a parade

WEST POINT (New York): More than 4,000 cadets — the famed long grey line of West Point paraded past General Norman Schwarzkof on Wednesday paying tribute to the West Point graduate who led the Allied forces to victory in the Gulf war, reports Reuter.

Carrying fixed bayonet M-14 rifles on their shoulders, and wearing full dress uniforms over white trousers, the cadets gave the 190-year-old military academy's highest honour to the general — a parade.

Schwarzkof dress in the camouflage fatigues he wore during Operation Desert Storm, called it a tribute not only to him but to all 531,000 US soldiers, airmen, marines and sailors who took part in the war.

He asked that all Gulf war troops in the crowd of about 3,000 spectators gathered on West Point's plain — its great lawn-stand behind him to watch the cadets parade past.



MALIBU (CA): Actor-director-producer Michael Landon went public about his inoperable liver and pancreas cancer and advised people to "live-every minute". Landon is pictured in the patio of his Spanish-style estate during press conference. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

**10 killed in plane crash:** A DOC-3 aircraft crashed minutes after taking off from a Colombian Airport on Wednesday, killing 10 people. Airport officials said, reports Reuter from Bogota.

The cargo aircraft, carrying 14 passengers and crew, began to lose height soon after taking off from Villavicencio Airport about 70 kms (45 miles) southeast of Bogota, the officials said.

It plunged to burst into flames killing 10 people, the other four people aboard the aircraft, were injured.

**41 drug dealers in Iran hanged:** Iran hanged 41 drug dealers including 22 Afghans Wednesday the official Iranian News Agency reported, Reuter reports from Nicosia.

Iran said the dealers were executed in the northeastern city of Mashhad, where 24 traffickers were hanged on April 29 and 34 on March 17.

**Yugoslavia without a head of state:** Yugoslavia parliament was to hold an emergency session Thursday after the country was left without a head of state when the Republic of Serbia blocked the election of Stipe Mesic of Croatia as new President, Reuter reports from Belgrade.

Serbia has staged a camouflaged coup d'etat, Milan Kucan, President of the Republic of Slovenia, told reporters at this moment there is no Yugoslavia.

Mesic, 57, who has served as Vice-President for the past year, failed to get the five votes needed in the eight man state presidency.

Bush keen to meet Gorbachev

President George Bush reiterated Wednesday that he wanted to meet with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, but said no agreement had been reached yet on holding the summit this summer in Moscow, AFP reports from Washington.

"Nothing happened since I talked to Gorbachev west weekend," Bush said in brief comments to the press.

"I want to have a summit. They know and we know what the conditions have been and are, but there's no decision on that."

The Soviets have urged the United States for several weeks to hold the summit in June, but US negotiators have insisted on ironing out sticking points before the meeting.

Mujahideen grip widens

Mujahideen forces led by Commander Ahmed Shah Massoud widened their grip on Khajaghar Wednesday, taking the military bases surrounding the northeastern Afghan city, his spokesman said in Peshawar, reports AFP.

The headquarters of the 55th division of the Afghan army, and all its buildings and their equipment have been conquered by the Mujahideen, said Ahmed Zia, Massoud's brother.

CDMR Massoud's forces allied with two other Afghan rebel factions had taken the city Monday.

Just 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the Soviet border, Khajaghar became the Administrative Centre for Takehar province after the fall of the provincial capital of Tologan in 1988.

7 killed in Punjab

An independent candidate contesting from the Adampur assembly constituency in Jalandhar district, Baljinder Singh, was among seven persons killed in Punjab since last night, PTI reports from Chandigarh.

Militants shot at and seriously wounded Secretary of the North Zone Hindu Shiv Sena, Sudhir Kumar Kakkar, near Morinda town of proper district. They also looted rupees ten lakh from a bank van in the state.

Larger military role sought Kohl for deploying German troops outside NATO

BONN, May 16: Chancellor Helmut Kohl, charting a collision course with the opposition Social Democrats (SPD), said on Wednesday that Germany must play a larger military role in the world, reports Reuter.

Kohl said Bonn, which cited constitutional limits for not sending troops to the Gulf, should now pass laws allowing its troops to be deployed outside the NATO area.

The SPD, which can refuse Kohl, the two-thirds majority needs to loosen post-war limits on Bonn's forces, said this week many of its members would not even back a role for German soldiers in United Nations peace-keeping units.

The Chancellor said Germany had not played its full role in the Gulf crisis.

"Germany, as it now is, with 80 million inhabitants and one of the strongest economies in the world, cannot step aside and say 'we'll leave that to others,'" Kohl told a foreign policy seminar run by his

when Bonn's low profile aroused criticism abroad, but spoke less about it in recent weeks as emotions calmed.

Critics in the SPD recently charged he was trying to expand Bonn's military role without an amendment by sending troops to help sweep mines and aid refugees in the Gulf.

SPD leaders who originally backed an amendment that would allow Germans into UN peace-keeping units found last week that many party members firmly opposed any such compromise.

Many left-wingers, arguing Germany's guilt in two world wars rules out any active role for their army, say troops must be limited to the direct defence of Germany and its allies.

Kohl said European integration and the common defence policy it would bring about would also require Bonn to amend its constitution and allow its troops to join their allies if the Europeans decided to intervene in a crisis outside of NATO.



Christian Democrat (CDU) party.

In a direct challenge to the SPD, he said the wanted to have a roll-call vote in Parliament on a constitutional amendment.

"I don't know how it will be decided, I am looking forward to the debate in Parliament," he said with a smile.

Kohl called for an amendment during the Gulf war.

CIA used Noriega to aid Contra rebels

MIAMI, (Florida) May 16: Ousted Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega said the Central Intelligence Agency used him to funnel hundreds of thousands of dollars to Nicaraguan Contra rebels, court documents made public on Wednesday said, reports Reuter.

Sections of the 107-page document, prepared by Noriega's defence lawyers, were released after US government officials deleted parts of it to protect top-secret information.



TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu (R) gestures while chatting with Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mustafizur Rahman (L) May 16 at the Prime Minister's official residence, Japan has decided to send a team of 50 people and two helicopters to cyclone-torn Bangladesh. — AFP photo

Nawaz Sharif softens Sharia law

ISLAMABAD, May 16: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) softened a controversial government-sponsored Islamic law during a parliamentary debate on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

But opposition People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was not satisfied with the law which declares the Islamic code of Sharia to be Pakistan's "supreme law."

The PDA withdrew several of its proposed amendments in protest against what it called

IDA stubbornness. But parliamentary sources said efforts were being made for a compromise on a PDA demand to guarantee the supremacy of the Parliament.

The National Assembly (Lower House) passed an IDA amendment that said the "present parliamentary democratic system and the existing system of government shall not be challenged to any court after the Sharia bill becomes law."

But Bhutto who denounced the bill as fundamentalist and undemocratic in a speech on Tuesday, said it was not enough.

We want supremacy of Parliament and to safeguard fundamental rights and rights of women, she told reporters.

Many pro-IDA Muslim clergyman on Wednesday denounced Bhutto for Tuesday's speech which called the Sharia bill un-Islamic, sectarian, unconstitutional and absurdist, and accused clerics of having played a negative role.

One who embraces Islam is bound to abide the teachings of Islam in tot, one cleric Moeenuddin Laknvi, said in a statement there is no place in between a Muslim and a Kafir (infidel) as Islam does not believe in liberalism.

The IDA defeated a PDA amendment that sought to declare the injections of Quran and Sunnah (practices of Prophet Muhammed) as the supreme source of law, rather than the supreme law.

But it accepted an amendment moved by Deputies from non-Muslim minorities which said that the minorities rights guaranteed in the Constitution would not be hit.