

Sharma takes office as president

NEW DELHI, July 25: Shankar Dayal Sharma, a veteran member of the governing Congress Party and a scholar of the ancient Sanskrit language, Saturday took office as India's 9th president.

Although Sharma will hold a largely ceremonial post, he could play an important role during his five-year term in times of constitutional crises and political uncertainties.

Sharma, 74, was driven in a black Mercedes from the 350-room Rastrapati Bhaban, or Presidential Palace, to the Parliament House where he took the oath of office from India's Chief Justice MH Karim.

Sharma, who has been a legislator, a chairman of the Upper House of Parliament and governor of three states, is reputed to be a fair and level-headed politician.

He studied at Harvard and Cambridge University in England, where he earned a doctorate in constitutional law. At the same time, he mastered the Hindu scriptures in Sanskrit language, which he speaks fluently.

Sharma was declared elected on July 16.

'Benazir looks good as Ishaq, Sharif in bad shape'
Sindh unrest may expedite army takeover

KARACHI, July 25: Sandbag bunkers have become as much a part of Karachi's landscape as palm tree-lined boulevards and seaside mansions since the government deployed troops to crack down on crime, reports AP.

Peering from behind the shoulder-high bunkers, soldiers slowly move their machine guns side-to-side, watching for the slightest hint of trouble in this city of 9 million.

In late May, the government deployed an estimated 50,000 soldiers and paramilitary troops to weed out the gangland-style bandits who have terrorized southern Sindh Province for nearly a decade. The troops arrived with unprecedented powers to search and arrest, with protection from prosecution.

The crackdown has reduced crime in Pakistan's most lawless province. But it has trained the uneasy governing partnership and prompted among residents fears of martial law or civil war in Sindh once the army operation is over.

"Short-term crime has gone down and those involved in crime are on the run. But in the long term, the criminals will continue."

Meanwhile, More than 3,000 people have been killed in politically-related violence in Sindh during the past decade, and successive governments have seemed unwilling or incapable of halting the relentless violence.

Tens of thousands of people, sometimes entire villages, were kidnapped. Murder and car theft skyrocketed and train robberies became so common that machine-gun-toting guards traveled with passengers.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and other government officials say the crackdown, which could last another four months, has restored some semblance of order to the countryside and to Karachi, the provincial capital and the country's industrial and financial hub.

But others contend the operation has backfired politically.

Differences over the scope of the army's authority have surfaced, creating cracks in the power-sharing partnership of the prime minister, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and army Chief-of-Staff Gen Asif Nawaz.

Many fear the strain has reached the point where the civilian government's future could be in danger.

Having already endured a quarter century of martial law many Pakistanis contend the ground is being prepared for another military takeover.

Others, however, say that wouldn't be so bad. Posters bearing Gen Nawaz's picture and an appeal for him to act have surfaced around the federal capital of Islamabad and neighboring Rawalpindi, the army's headquarters.

Sindh's troubles also have given new political life to Ms Bhutto, who months ago had all but been dismissed by critics, diplomats and even some of her supporters as a has-been.

Rejuvenated by the government's troubles, the 39-year-old former premier is demanding the president and



Benazir Bhutto

legislatures later this month if those demands aren't met.

"Bhutto is looking good mainly because the president and the prime minister are looking so bad," said Najem Sethi, editor of the weekly English-language newspaper Friday Times.

The generals believe that Bhutto has learned her lessons and is being quite sensible

now," Sethi said. This is a far cry from August 1990 when the Pakistani establishment and the religious lobby conspired to keep her out of politics.

While Ms Bhutto gains in stature, the president and the prime minister have been badly tarnished by their former support for the Mahajir Qaumi Movement.

Once a crucial pillar in Sharif's governing coalition, the MQM withdrew its support after the army operation started. Now it is likened to a mafia and accused of operating dozens of torture chambers to persecute party dissidents and political opponents, terrorist organisation.

The army's operation prompted key MQM leaders to leave the country and sent thousands of their well-armed supporters underground. But the party's powerful organization remains intact and its leaders are threatening to turn Karachi's streets into battleground of urban guerrilla warfare.



Nawaz Sharif

LA riot was spontaneous, says FBI

LOS ANGELES, July 25: Rioting that followed the acquittal of four white officers in the videotaped beating of a black motorist was spontaneous and there was no indication of a pre-planned conspiracy, the FBI said Friday, reports AP.

More than 100 federal, state and local investigators have yet to uncover any prearranged strategy for an urban uprising, said Charlie Parsons, agent-in-charge of the FBI's Los Angeles office.

But Parsons added that street gangs were behind much of the arson and violent crime during the April 29 to May 1 riots, and that some individual acts were planned.

"Some of the arsons, some of the thefts, were not just something casual where someone walking down the street decided to go after it. They sat down and collaborated and decided what the target was going to be and they went after it," Parsons said.

Investigators were following about 200 leads involving riot-related crimes, Parsons said.

LA riot was spontaneous, says FBI

Off the Record

'Copy book' president

NEW DELHI: Ramaswamy Venkataraman, who laid down office today, was by all accounts a "copy-book" president, reports PTI.

Eighty-one-year old Venkataraman who handed over charge to Shankar Dayal Sharma, proved more than once his intention to stick to constitution.

A stickler for rules this aspect of his powers found full play when he had a deal with political uncertainties on four occasions in his five-year term to steer the country through grave political crisis.

Venkataraman's decisions during these situations were generally welcomed giving proof of the soundness of his interpretation of the letter and spirit of the constitution.

Venkataraman, variously described as a "rubber-stamp and an activist" president, himself admitted at a farewell given by parliamentarians that "normal power" went on the blink a little too frequently during his tenure.

He was brave enough to do it

AUSTRALIA: A 13-year-old was recovering in hospital Saturday after surviving a crocodile attack by waiting until his leg was released by the reptile's powerful jaws, reports AP.

"My boy was yelling out that the croc had got him, and I was yelling to him to stand still and pray, because if he'd lifted his leg quickly the croc would have taken it off," said the boy's father, Rev Dudley Cooper.

"He was brave enough to do it. He was waiting for the croc to open his mouth and bite again, but he felt him open his mouth, took his leg out, and the croc went away."

The boy had been on a hunting trip with his father, the local united Church minister, when the crocodile struck Friday afternoon. They had been wading through muddy hip-high water in a remote swamp.

\$1.4 lakh offer for full 'kiss and tell'

LONDON: Antonia De Sancha, the actress who had an affair with Cabinet Minister David Mellor, was considering selling her story to one of the Sunday tabloid newspapers, according to press reports here today, says AFP.

De Sancha had said in a press interview that she "would never stoop so low" as to accept money from newspapers over the affair. But her representatives had approached several Sunday tabloids Friday, the Guardian reported.

She had apparently turned down at least one offer of 70,000 pounds (140,000 dollar) for the full "kiss-and-tell" story, but was seeking a smaller sum to discuss her career and ordeal so far.

Meanwhile Mellor posed for press photographers with his wife, two sons and his wife's parents at their home in Sussex, south-east of London, in a now of family unity Friday. Prime Minister John Major repeated his support for his national heritage minister.

Hitlers were burnt in '70

MOSCOW: Russian journalist and historian Lev Bezimensky claimed Friday the bodies of Adolf Hitler and his wife of a day, Eva Braun, were burnt in 1970, reports AFP.

In an interview with the Russian daily paper Komsomolskaya Pravda, Bezimensky said the bodies of the German dictator and his wife along with those of members of propaganda minister Josef Goebbels' family and third reich major general Hans Krebs were not, as believed, disposed of in June 1945.

BRIEFLY

Ilizarov dies in Russia: Gavril Ilizarov, an orthopedic surgeon who specialized in treating bone ailments with an unorthodox procedure, has died at the age of 71, reports said Saturday, according to AP from Moscow.

Ilizarov, director of the Center of Traumatology and Orthopedics in the Siberian town of Kurgan, died Friday, the Itar-Tass news agency said. The cause of death was not given.

The news agency said he successfully treated tens of thousands of patients, both foreign and Russian, with his techniques which included regeneration of nerve tissue and restructuring of bones.

His unorthodox methods included treatment of broken or deformed bones with a set of metal rings, rods and needles instead of the traditional immobilizing plaster cast.

Japanese satellite in orbit: NASA launched a rocket Friday with a Japanese scientific satellite that will swing by the moon and be flung by lunar gravity nearly a million miles (1.6 million kilometers) into space, reports AP from Cape Carveral.

The satellite's first encounter with the moon will come in early September. Until then, the craft will be in an elliptical Earth orbit.

Scientists will use the satellite to explore the tail of the magnetosphere, a comet-shaped region surrounding Earth and containing the radiation belts. The region extends nearly 3 million miles (4.8 million kilometers) from Earth; the satellite will venture only as far as 871,000 miles (1.3 million kilometers).

The 160 million four-year mission is a joint project between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Japanese Institute for Space and Astronautical science. NASA supplied the Delta rocket and some scientific instruments, and Japan provided the satellite, called Geotail.

Palestinian boy shot dead: A 6-year-old Palestinian boy was killed by Israeli army gunfire Friday after his father ignored orders to stop his car at an army roadblock, Arab reporters said, AP says from Gaza City.

Naim Kamel Abu Amouna of the Khan Younis refugee camp was shot in the back and head, the reporters said.

They said the shooting occurred after his father, Kamel Mohammed Abu Amouna, refused to stop at an army roadblock. The boy was taken to the Abu Kabir Pathological Institute in Israel, where he was pronounced dead.

Quake jolts California: A strong aftershock from last month's twin earthquakes rumbled through southern California on Friday, triggering landslides and causing some minor damage but no injuries, authorities said, Reuters reports from Los Angeles.

The quake, which occurred at about 11.15 a.m. (1815 GMT), registered 4.7 on the Richter scale, according to seismologists at the California Institute of Technology.

It was centred about 13 miles (20 km) north-west of the desert town of Indio, about 100 miles (160 km) east of Los Angeles, they said.

Blake Goetz, battalion Chief for the Palm Springs Fire Department, said the quake touched off landslides in unpopulated areas of the high desert and knocked some goods off shop shelves.

Quake shakes northern Japan: An earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale northern Japan Saturday. But there were no immediate reports of damage of casualties, the Meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicenter of the tremor, which hit at 11:53 a.m. (0253 GMT) was situated beneath the Pacific Ocean off the northern island of Honshu.

Seismologists say an earthquake of magnitude six on the open-ended Richter scale can have the power to cause considerable damage in a populated area.

On the seven-step Japanese earthquake scale, the strongest reading was registering in Ishinomaki, 350 kilometers (220 miles) northeast of Tokyo.



AYODHYA: A Hindu policeman touches the feet of a Hindu saint at an airport near Ayodhya on Friday. The saint is a member of a Hindu team which was returning from talks in New Delhi with premier PV Narasimha Rao to resolve the temple-mosque crisis. Radical Hindus who are building a temple at the site of an ancient mosque in Ayodhya said that their crusade would continue, dashing hopes that a way to end the crisis had been found in the talks.

Fujimori will try rebels in military court

LIMA, July 25: President Alberto Fujimori announced new measures to combat terrorism after a week-long offensive by Shining Path rebels claimed at least 30 lives, reports AP.

Speaking late Friday on nationwide television, Fujimori said rebels accused of assassination would now be tried in military and not civilian courts. He also said terrorists who claimed human lives would be regarded as traitors.

Fujimori did not elaborate, but under Peru's constitution, treason is the only crime for which the death penalty is permitted.

Peace will be built on the ashes of our dead, Fujimori said, referring to the more than 25,000 people who have been slain since the Shining Path took up arms in 1980.

Fujimori also said the sale of ammonium nitrate, a fertilizer used to heighten the explosive potential of car bombs, would now be strictly controlled.

US wants to mediate China's dispute with neighbours

MANILA, July 25: The United States is willing to help mediate in a territorial dispute between China and its regional neighbours, according to a senior US official who arrived here today with Secretary of State James Baker today, reports Reuters.

The senior official said the fact that Baker, tired from talks with Arabs and Israelis, flew 14 hours to attend the meeting was proof that the United States "intends to stay involved" in Asia.

He is due to return to Washington on Sunday.

Discussing the dispute over the spratly islands in the South China sea, the US official said: "we don't have a claim in this fight (but) we're prepared to play a role if all of the claimants want us to".

Asked if China and the other countries wanted such assistance, he replied: "ask me that on Sunday" after the ASEAN meeting ends.

The spratlys, believed to be rich in oil and natural gas reserves, have long been claimed in whole or in part by China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

They became a potential flashpoint recently when China contracted with an American company to begin exploring for oil in the area.

The dispute was one of the main items on the agenda during an ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting that preceded the current talks. The ministers issued a joint statement on Wednesday calling for the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The regional body groups—the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei and Singapore.

The United States has urged that the matter should be resolved without violence.

Baker, on his first visit to the Philippines as secretary of state, is due to meet the country's new president: Ramos.

Tough laws to break Mafia grip

ROME, July 25: Italy's Senate on Friday approved tough new laws to break the Mafia's deadly grip, hours after the funeral for the country's top anti-Mafia fighter, reports AP.

Police in Palermo, the Mafia's Sicilian stronghold, reportedly arrested the first suspect in Sunday's car-bombing of Judge Paolo Borsellino and five police bodyguards.

Borsellino's killing, the second Mafia assassination in two months, has dominated much of Italian television and newspaper coverage, all week.

Galvanized by public pressure, the Senate on Friday passed laws that Borsellino and his colleagues had been demanding for years.

Once the package is approved by the lower house, police will be allowed to make block-by-block house searches. Wiretapping will be more widespread, and police efforts to infiltrate organized crime will be stepped up.

The sweeping measure gives more protection to police informants and repentant mobsters, who are vital to

cracking the Mafia's still-solid code of silence. A national "super-prosecutor" will direct the country's crackdown on the Mafia and related crime gangs.

Sen. Giorgio Covi said the country's anti-Mafia fight requires "systematic initiatives rather than individual emergency measures."

The vote was 163 to 106, approval by the Chamber of Deputies is expected next week, and the government says it will implement the measures.

Sharad Pawar in China

BEIJING, July 25: Indian Defence Minister Sharad Pawar has arrived for a five-day visit to China, the first by an Indian Defence Minister since the founding of the people's republic in 1949, a reliable source said today, reports AFP.

The Indian minister arrived in the Chinese capital Friday night, although he was not formally scheduled here until Saturday afternoon, the source said.

There was no official explanation for the change.

Pawar was scheduled to meet Saturday afternoon with his Chinese counterpart, general Qin Jiwei, and was expected to meet other top Chinese government figures on Sunday.

A meeting with Premier Li Peng is planned, an authoritative source said.

It is expected that during Pawar's visit the two countries will announce a mutual troops reduction along the Sino-Indian border, an official source said Thursday, in New Delhi.

Miyazawa hopes today's election to solidify his position

TOKYO, July 25: Kichii Miyazawa, after a bumpy start as prime minister, hopes a strong showing by his Liberal Democratic Party in Sunday's parliamentary election will help solidify his position, Reports AP.

It would be an impressive rebound for Miyazawa, who took office November 5 and soon became so unpopular that party officials tried to keep him from campaigning for the Liberal Democrats in a by-election.

Earlier this year, Miyazawa was reeling from a bribery scandal involving a top associate and from his inability to get important legislation through Parliament. There was talk of him losing the party's backing as prime minister before the national election.

Today, those troubles seem a faint memory.

Miyazawa is fresh from the Group of Seven summit in Munich, where he won support for Japan's demand that Russia return a group of tiny islands occupied at the end of World War II.

Little wonder that he has seemed relaxed and confident, even cracking jokes, during the campaign that ends with Sunday's vote for 127 of the 252 seats in the upper house of Parliament.

"He didn't stand out before, but his popularity is picking up," said Genichiro Sada, a Liberal Democratic legislator who watched Miyazawa campaign for candidates in central Japan.

Surprisingly political analysts say the slowing economy works in favour of the Liberal Democrats, a conservative pro-American party that has governed Japan since the mid-1950s.



As Setzaburo Sato put it: "When the economy is booming, some voters can be more experimental, bolder (and) support the opposition, but

now they will be more careful, otherwise the Japanese economy will get worse."

Several opinion polls released in the past few days indicate the Liberal Democrats will win more than half the seats at stake.

That would be a remarkable turnaround from three years ago, when they lost their majority in the upper house for the first time because of voter anger about a new consumption tax and bribery and sex scandals involving party leaders.

Although the Liberal Democrats lost too many seats in 1989 to regain a majority, polls indicate they will be able to pass legislation in the upper house if they can continue to work with centrist opposition parties.

The more powerful lower house has the final say on the budget and selecting the prime minister, but other legislation must pass both houses.

While a strong Liberal Democratic showing in the election would provide a boost for the party's plan to have Japan gradually expand its international role, it would not ensure smooth political sailing for Miyazawa.

Many of the Liberal Democratic candidates are loyal to senior politicians other than the prime minister, making it unlikely he can translate an electoral victory into long-term clout within the party.

Also, in contrast to the rise in Miyazawa's own approval rating, a survey published Friday by the economic daily Nihon Keizai showed support for his Cabinet at only 33.4 per cent. That could

decline even more if prosecutors confirm allegations that a trucking company linked to criminals channeled large amounts of money to top politicians.

Neither Miyazawa nor other political parties have been able to breathe life into what has been a lackluster campaign most notable for a dearth of issues and voter interest.

In a story about how dull the campaign was, the national newspaper Mainichi quoted a Liberal Democratic official as saying, "Compared with three years ago, this election is completely unexciting."

The Socialists, the largest opposition party, have tried to whip up support by attacking a new law allowing Japanese ground troops to be deployed abroad for the first time since World War II.

The 70-year-old Communist Party has tried to divorce itself from deposed Marxist groups in the now-defunct Soviet Union and elsewhere, and has reminded voters it was the only party to oppose World War II.

A 2-month-old party called New Japan has tried to tap the large pool of voters who are discontented with the scandal-tainted political system.

Polls indicate, however, that none of the opposition parties has struck a responsive chord. In particular, they show that an attempt by Japan's largest labour federation to unify the opposition against the Liberal Democrats appears headed for failure.

ANC plans mass protest next month

JOHANNESBURG, July 25: The African National Congress (ANC) planned huge marches and rallies across South Africa today as a prelude to mass protests next month aimed at forcing the white government from power, reports Reuters.

The demonstrations overshadowed a peace mission by UN trouble-shooter Cyrus Vance, who has been meeting politicians to try to find a way out of South Africa's political crisis.

Demonstrations and marches are by their very nature inconvenient but that is part of the price we have to pay for democracy," said ANC official Willie Hofmeyr.

In Johannesburg, protesters prepared to march on city police headquarters to call for an end to bloodshed in black townships and a quick transition to multi-racial democracy.

Thousands of people planned to form a human chain in Cape Town's city centre and to march on government buildings in Pretoria.