

Sudanese oppose Sharia law

ABUJA, May 5: Sudanese government and rebel delegates both rejected a compromise proposal by Nigerian mediators on imposing strict Islamic Sharia Law in Sudan, but peace talks will continue, negotiators said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), fighting for a secular Sudan, turned down the Nigerian suggestion that Sharia should not be applied to hundreds of thousands of Southerners living in the Muslim north for an unspecified period.

SPLA delegates said, however, that Sharia, which has the main sticking point in the talks, should still be on the agenda when negotiations resume here in the Nigerian capital later Tuesday.

"We do not want a law that governs the relationship between a state and individuals to be derived from a religion," SPLA delegation spokesman Nihal Deng Nihal declared.

"We want Sharia to be a personal law, which Muslims would submit to voluntarily, and not a state law. In other words, we want a return to the pre-1983 situation, before the government imposed Sharia," he added.

Since that year, the SPLA in the mainly animist and Christian south has been battling successive Khartoum regimes, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. Relief agencies say more than two million people in the south face famine.

The government spokesman, Planning Minister Ali Al-Hajj Mohammed, declared: "our compromise to the SPLA is that we shall not make Islam the religion of the state of Sudan."

President-parliament political conflict Russian army to remain neutral

MOSCOW, May 5: Defence Minister Pavel Grachev reiterated today that the army would remain neutral in the political conflict between the president and conservative dominated parliament, reports AFP.

Speaking before a group of Soviet army veterans, Grachev said it would be "inadmissible" to drag the Russian army into "setting political scores."

"The political struggle must be carried out within the constitutional and legal framework without having to rely on security forces, especially the army," he said.

Grachev has been a loyal supporter of Yeltsin in the latter's struggle with his hard-line foes.

Meanwhile, President Boris Yeltsin Tuesday in a joint statement issued with Prime

Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said, May Day rioting in Moscow was a deliberate bid by a "communist minority" to derail Russia from reform.

Further attempts to drag the populace into provocation and acts of violence would be firmly countered, he said.

The unrest on Saturday had been "an open and direct attempt by an extremist and communist minority to divert Russia from the peaceful path of reforms," Yeltsin said.

Moscow's Special Forces Chief Vitaly Ketko said the clashes between communist demonstrators and security forces which left hundreds of wounded was organised by nationalist soldiers who also joined in.

Tuesday's papers, the first to appear since the street fighting commented at length on the spectacle. The pro-re-

form press published photographs of demonstrators charring police lines.

Deputies of the National Salvation Front which staged the original demonstration for their part complained of the use of violence by the authorities against a "peaceful demonstration."

In conservative paper and parliament's publication Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Ilya Konstantinov, Mikhail Astafiev and Vladimir Issakov asserted that the authorities had mounted a "deliberate provocation" to pave the way for the introduction of emergency measures.

The trio urged Russians to turn out again next Sunday to mark the anniversary of the World War II victory over Hitler's Germany.

In the government journal Rossiyskiye Vesti, one of

Yeltsin's most radical advisers, Mikhail Potoranin, attacked the "political axis" uncovered by the May Day events, comprising the conservative parliament, the failed coup-makers of August 1991, and what he called "communist-fascists."

Potoranin said Parliamentary Speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, Yeltsin's sworn enemy, should resign, along with Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi who has moved openly into opposition to Yeltsin, and Central Bank Governor Victor Gerashchenko, who opposes liberal reforms.

The middle of the road civil union, which kept a low profile during Yeltsin's successful April referendum on who should rule Russia, broke its silence Tuesday in the newspaper Rabochaya Tribuna to urge Yeltsin to "convert and not conquer."

Off the Record

Pope's memorabilia available

DENVER: All sorts of pope memorabilia will be available during the pontiff's visit this summer, but don't expect a piece of the ground he walks on, reports AP.

A guy wanted to walk behind the Holy Father and scoop up the dirt he'd walked on and sell it as 'ground the pope walked on.' We licensing souvenirs for the World Youth Day conference.

There will be pope mugs, water bottles, T-shirts, blankets, jackets, parkas, sunglasses, sunscreen, socks, scarves, hats, sweat pants, fanny packs, backpacks, umbrellas, tins of chocolates and periscopes called "Pope Scopes."

Prices will range from dirls 1 for decals to dirls 1,000 for a commemorative gold coin.

Pope John Paul II is scheduled to be in Denver August 12-15 for the conference. Souvenirs will go on sale beginning in June, Lemke said.

She wants to divorce her biological parents

SARASOTA, Fla: A switched-at-birth teenager at the centre of a tug-of-war between two families is seeking to "divorce" her biological parents, reports AP.

Kimberly Mays, 14, wants to terminate Ernest and Regina Twigg's parental rights because she is living happily with Robert Mays, said her lawyer, George Russ.

"She doesn't need another family," Russ said. "She doesn't want another family."

The court papers were filed Tuesday.

Kimberly was born in 1978 at a hospital in Wauchula. A still-unexplained baby swap sent her home with the wrong parents. A decade later, genetic tests revealed the error. Arlene, the girl raised by the Twiggs, died of a heart defect in 1988. Since then, the two families have fought over Kimberly.

The petition says Kimberly has a "close, loving and nurturing parent-child relationship" with Mays, a widower who remarried.

"Kimberly does not love the Twiggs," the petition says. "The Twiggs are perceived by Kimberly to be unwelcome intruders into her private life."

Homosexuals no less able to control sexual urges

WASHINGTON: Homosexuals are no less able to control their sexual urges than heterosexuals, according to psychological research prompted by the prospect of lifting the military's ban of gays, reports AP.

"Levels of sexual drive and frequency of sexual activity are not related to sexual orientation," Gregory M Herek says in an article in American Psychologist, the journal of the American Psychological Association.

Herek used that finding to make an argument for removing the directive that bars open homosexuals from joining the military.

Another social scientist, Charles Moskos of Northwestern University, concluded from the same finding that the ban should not be lifted.

Moskos agreed that homosexuals are neither more nor less likely to control their sexual urges, but added: "And that's why we don't mix men and women together. It is as silly to say that gays are constantly on the make as it is to say they are never on the make. Both can control it, and sometimes both can't."

Herek cited a number of studies that "do not indicate that lesbians and gay men are more likely than heterosexuals to possess any psychological characteristics that would make them less capable of controlling their sexual or romantic urges, of refraining from the abuse of power, of obeying rules and laws, of interacting effectively with others or of exercising good judgement in handling authority."

'An eye for an eye'

NEW YORK: Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, using the United States as a base, has delivered his fundamentalist message in tapes, a book and television interviews, reports AP.

"An eye for an eye, and a dead man for a dead man," he said in one underground tape. "You, Muslim youth, should declare a fierce war against the pharaohs of Egypt and its sinners. ... They are dying and falling at your feet like dirty flies."

In Egypt, his followers have translated his words into action. They have attacked police, Coptic, Christians and tourists in escalating unrest that has killed about 140 people and wounded 250 since the beginning of 1992.

In the United States, Arab immigrants who attended his sermons in New Jersey have been charged in the February 26 bombing of the World Trade Center that killed six people and wounded more than 1,000.

Trial of 58 Algerians begins

ALGIERS, May 5: The trial opens today of 58 people accused of involvement in a bomb attack which killed nine people and left 123 injured last August at Algiers airport, judicial sources said, reports AFP.

The government blamed the attack on Islamic fundamentalists.

The defendants, 26 of whom are still being sought, will be tried before a special court in Algiers.

The charges also include two other bomb attacks targeting the offices of Air France and Swisair neither of which caused casualties.

The alleged ring leader, Hocine Abderrahim is a former senior aide of Abassi Madani, the leader of the banned Islamic Salvation Front.



Mourners file past poster of slain President Ranasinghe Premadasa Tuesday outside the Presidential Palace in Colombo where Premadasa's body lies in state. — AFP/UNB photo

LTTE mourns Premadasa's death

COLOMBO, May 5: Tamil Tiger guerrillas who have been accused of assassinating President Ranasinghe Premadasa were mourning the death of the Sri Lankan leader, military and Tamil sources here said today, reports AFP.

The separatists Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) put up white flags to express grief over Saturday's suicide bombing of Premadasa at a May Day rally here, military officials said.

They said residents in the LTTE-controlled areas of the island's north had been encouraged by the Tigers to hoist white flags as a sign of respect for the slain president.

"People travelling from the north say that white flags have been ordered by the Tigers," a Tamil source here said.

The Sri Lankan police have said that the suspected suicide attacker had a cyanide capsule, a trade mark of the LTTE which has highly dedicated cadres who would rather die than be captured alive.

The LTTE had denied involvement in bombing Premadasa and 23 others along with him and in turn blamed his political rivals from the majority Sinhalese community.

Premadasa initiated a dialogue with the LTTE in April 1989 but the peace talks were aborted when the guerrillas suddenly pulled out 14 months later to resume their violent struggle for an independent homeland.

Meanwhile, AP adds: After a decade of civil war, Sri Lankans have become inured to bloodshed.

When President Ranasinghe Premadasa was assassinated by a suicide bomber on Saturday, hundreds of thousands of people mourned his death. Some celebrated it, and set of fire-crackers in joy.

But Premadasa also was a man of the common people from a low-ranking caste who had risen through labour unions. In his four years in office, he provided housing and food for the poor.

Premadasa's death leaves a vacuum in the governing party. But the removal of a man much loved by his supporters and much reviled by his enemies could relax political tensions and give greater stability to the government, said one Western diplomat.

The war against the secessionist Tamils, which has settled into a static campaign, is unlikely to shift course.

More than 18,000 people have been killed in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, including many civilians, since the Tamil war for an independent homeland began in 1983.

Thousands more died when the government crushed a right-wing radical movement in the southern and central parts of the country in the late 1980s.

Rajiv killing trial opens

NEW DELHI, May 5: The Rajiv Gandhi assassination trial opened in a special court in southern India today, almost two years after the former Prime Minister was slain by a woman suicide-bomber, reports AFP.

The trial began in a court set up inside the high-security Poonamallee Jail near Madras city, capital of Tamil Nadu state, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Prosecutor P Rajamanickam charged in opening remarks before Judge S M Siddick that Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had plotted and carried out the May 21, 1991 slaying, PTI said.

Gandhi's assassination by a woman who had strapped explosives to her body and detonated them at a Tamil Nadu election rally was described by the attorney as 'devilishly unique.'

He said the slaying had been plotted and "transposed from the realm of fiction to reality" by LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, who is leading the bloody fight for an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka's northeast.

Twenty-six people suspected to be activists or sympathisers of the guerrilla group have been arrested and charged with involvement in the assassination. Prabhakaran has been declared a fugitive.

Judge Siddick posted the next hearing for May 12 after hearing the prosecution's case, PTI said.

Gandhi was prime minister from 1984 to 1989. In mid-1987 he sent thousands of Indian troops to Sri Lanka under an accord with Colombo aimed at ending the Tamil separatist campaign by offering greater autonomy for the Tamils.

The troops ended up fighting a bloody bush war against the LTTE after the guerrillas repudiated the accord, refused to lay down arms and retreated into the jungles. The Indian soldiers returned home in 1990 after Gandhi had lost power.



Rajiv Gandhi

One-day ultimatum to free Spanish priest

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, May 5: The military chief said Wednesday he is giving Muslim kidnappers one day to free a Spanish priest before he orders government forces to attack their suspected hideout, reports AP.

Gen Lisandro Abadia, the armed forces chief, said some four military battalions have encircled the area on Basilan Island where the Rev Bernardo Blanco was believed being held.

"We are not giving them any chance (to escape)," Abadia said.

Basilan is just south of this port city and about 880 kilometers (550 miles) south of Manila.

Abadia said military action was approved after negotiations for Blanco's freedom bogged down.

Gunmen kill 4 black policemen

SOWETO, South Africa, May 5: Four black policemen were killed and six officers wounded Wednesday when their truck was ambushed by gunmen in Soweto, the black township outside Johannesburg, reports AP.

Police also reported violence in several black areas near Johannesburg, and it appeared the region was experiencing a fresh wave of unrest. Students began protesting in many regions Tuesday, which apparently sparked several of the confrontations.

In Soweto, a truck packed with 14 black police was taking the officers to their posts just before 6 am (0400 GMT) when the vehicle stopped at a traffic light. It was surrounded by gunmen who opened fire with AK-47 assault rifles, police Maj. Herman Oosthuysen said.

"We found at least 30 AK-47 cartridges at the scene," said Oosthuysen, noting that one of the injured was a policeman in serious condition. "There was a lot of shooting."

Police immediately launched a ground and air search in Soweto, a sprawling city with some 3 million black residents.

No one claimed responsibility, but black militants regularly attack police. Last year, 226 officers were killed, the highest total ever. Blacks, who make up about half the South African police, account for the majority of those killed in recent years.

BRIEFLY

11 killed in Taiwan fire: A family of eleven died yesterday when a pre-dawn fire ripped through their house in the northern Taiwan city of Taoyuan, 40 kilometers (24.8 miles) southwest of Taipei, police said, AFP reports from Taipei.

The 11 members of the Chang family were sleeping when the blaze started on the ground floor of their two-story building at 4:01 am (2001 GMT Tuesday).

Fire engines were rushed to the scene and the blaze was extinguished within an hour.

All 11 victims died from inhaling smoke, police said.

French tourist dies in Thailand: A French tourist died of a drug overdose in northern Thailand, local police said yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

The man, who could not be immediately identified, died Tuesday in a hospital in Chiangmai, some 700 kilometres (430 miles) north of Bangkok, said police contacted by telephone.

He had been admitted to hospital after an overdose of heroin, they said.

Bad liquor claims 7 in China: Bad liquor made illegally from methyl alcohol killed seven people, blinded five and paralyzed five others, an official report said Wednesday, AP reports from Beijing.

Tests showed the liquor contained 800 to 1,000 times more methyl alcohol than is standard, the China Daily said. Methyl alcohol is used as an antifreeze, a general solvent and fuel.

The methyl alcohol came from two watchmen at the Jiamusi Chemical Pharmaceutical Factory, who stole it from the plant and sold it to farmers making bootleg liquor, the report said.

Malaysian Defence Minister in Iran: Malaysian Defence Minister Najib Tun Razak met Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in Tehran Tuesday to discuss plans to boost ties, the official news agency IRNA said, AFP reports from Tehran.

It did not specify when the Malaysian Minister arrived in Iran.

In April, Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad made a first visit to Iran by a Malaysian premier. He was accompanied by several ministers and around 50 businessmen.

Carter to monitor Paraguay poll: Former US President Jimmy Carter is to lead 25 international observers monitoring Paraguay's presidential election on Sunday, officials said Tuesday, AFP reports from Washington.

Carter was asked by all three presidential candidates to help monitor the poll, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs said.

3 Palestinians shot dead in Gaza: Three Palestinians were shot dead in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday and 45 were wounded including a child later pronounced clinically dead, AFP reports from Gaza City.

Another Palestinian died on the West Bank of gunshot wounds incurred last week, bringing the total of deaths from political violence to eight in the past 24 hours, the highest toll since Israel sealed off the occupied territories at the end of March, Arab sources said.

Rafsanjani meets Vietnamese FM: Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on Tuesday met Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Manh Cam and said both countries should help each other with post-war reconstruction, AFP reports from Tehran.

Cam, the first Vietnamese Foreign Minister to visit Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution, promised his country "would take serious steps to expand economic and other ties with Iran, the official Iranian news agency IRNA said.

Cam, accompanied by a high-ranking delegation, also met Iranian Agriculture Minister Issa Kalantari to discuss agricultural cooperation in "food-processing industries, fisheries and forestry," according to IRNA.

4 skull dealers held in Nepal: Four people have been arrested for smuggling 22 human skulls into Nepal with the intention of selling them to curio dealers, a police source said Tuesday, AFP reports from Kathmandu.

The smugglers, hiding the skulls inside a vegetable basket had arrived at the Thankot checkpoint the only entry point to the Kathmandu valley from other parts of the country, in a bus from Gaur, a village 135 kilometers (85 miles) south of here.

Police identified the skull dealers as Nanak Das, 23, Mahan Yadav 22, T I Yadav, 32, and Mahendra Yadav, 8, all of Rautahat district, 140 kilometers (87 miles) south of Kathmandu.

Queen in Hungary

BUDAPEST, May 5: Queen Elizabeth II decried the violence convulsing Bosnia and told Hungarian legislators Wednesday that Britain wants to play an active role in restoring peace, reports AP.

"The outbreak of ethnic violence that has followed the collapse of the old order is a terrible reminder of man's capacity for inhumanity to man. Through the United Nations and the European Community, Britain is seeking with others to restore peace and bring humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia," she said.

"You have relit the flame and it shines all the more brightly because of the sacrifices made for it. Hungary has proved a pathfinder, not just of freedom, but of the peaceful road to independence and democracy," said the Queen, wearing a deep pink dress and matching wide-brimmed hat.

The address was one of few occasions when the Queen spoke before a foreign national assembly.

Addressing the nation in a live broadcast on her first visit to a former Warsaw Pact country, she told Hungarians of her interest in their search for freedom throughout the four

'Consensus among Cambodian factions not easy'

BEIJING, May 5: The top United Nations official in Cambodia said Wednesday it will be difficult for the war-torn nation's four rival factions to resolve their differences over this month's planned elections, reports AP.

"It will not be easy to achieve any kind of consensus with these four parties holding positions which are quite far apart," said Yusushi Akashi, head of the UN peacekeeping mission in Cambodia.

Cambodia's reconciliation leader, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, invited Akashi and the four factions to meet in Beijing to discuss the deterioration of the situation in Cambodia as the nation prepares for its first free elections in decades under a 1991 peace accord.

Son Sann, head of a non-communist group, and representatives of the Hun Sen government in Phnom Penh are expected to attend. Sihanouk's half-brother will represent the prince's group.

The Khmer Rouge has not formally said it would attend, but Akashi said he believed Khieu Samphan, head of the Communist group, was coming.

The Khmer Rouge is boycotting the May 23-28 elections, claiming they are rigged in favour of the Vietnamese-installed government in Phnom Penh.

On Tuesday, Khmer Rouge guerrillas ambushed a convoy carrying election workers, killing a Japanese peace-keeper and wounding at least eight others.

The attack came a day after a major Khmer Rouge assault on a provincial capital, suggesting the Communist group is resorting to increasingly bloody means to undermine the elections.

Reporters asked Akashi whether the Khmer Rouge violence might jeopardize the elections.

Akashi said the UN mission still intends to do everything possible... to hold elections which are acceptable by international standards and which (fulfill) the standards of human rights and political freedom."

Akashi spoke to reporters after a 3 1/2-hour meeting with Sihanouk at his residence in Beijing. The prince is undergoing medical treatment in the Chinese capital.

Akashi said Sihanouk apologized for the violence by his compatriots against all these people who are in Cambodia to help the country to establish peace and democracy.

On Tuesday, Sihanouk issued a statement condemning the resurgence of factional warfare and warning that the nation's very existence is at stake.

"Our Cambodia will not survive unless my armed compatriots agree to reconcile their differences and achieve a complete peace among them," Sihanouk said.

The prince formerly led one of the four rival factions and is chairman of the Supreme National Council, intended to be a reconciliation body.

He is not running in the elections and does not plan to return home for them. But Akashi said Sihanouk reiterated his support for the UN sponsored elections.

Turkish PM confirms candidacy

ANKARA, May 5: Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel officially confirmed his candidacy Tuesday for upcoming Presidential Elections, representing the right-wing True Path Party, reports AFP.

Demirel's announcement, made to the True Path Party's parliamentary group, followed a meeting Sunday with coalition partner Erdal Inonu, leader of the centre left Social Democratic Populist Party (SDPP), at which Onon Gavets support for Demirel's candidacy.

The SDPP's continued support depends on Demirel maintaining the right-left coalition of elected, according to editorials in the Turkish press.