

## International

**Malaysia bans Al-Arqam Islamic sect**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 5: Malaysia today announced an immediate ban on the Al-Arqam messianic Islamic sect, and said it would prosecute its followers who refuse to ban on what the clergy considers as deviationist teachings, reports AFP.

"At least six national laws, including one that governs security, will be used to enforce the nation-wide ban on the group and its activities," Hamid Othman, a senior official in Malaysian Premier Mahathir Mohamad's office, told a packed news conference.

All Al-Arqam's religious schools in the country will be closed and its vast business, social and cultural activities and publications disallowed with immediate effect, he said.

Al-Arqam, which began as a study group among Muslim scholars in predominantly Muslim Malaysia in 1968, has

blossomed into a powerful and wealthy missionary group with branches in 15 countries under its elusive self-styled leader Ashaari Muhammad.

**MPs loyal to Sonia blast Rao's handling of bank scam**

NEW DELHI, Aug 5: India's ruling Congress Party, reeling under an opposition campaign over the nation's worst financial scandal, is also facing an internal revolt on the issue, politicians said today, reports Reuter.

They said Congress deputies, regarded as "Sonia loyalists" because of their closeness to Rajiv Gandhi's Italian-born widow, had launched a blistering attack against Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's handling of the 1.28 billion US dollar scandal.

"There's a fracture," said senior politician Jaswant Singh, lower house deputy for the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

"How serious it is will depend on how much strain is

put on the fracture," Singh told Reuter.

Some Congress deputies close to the family of Rajiv Gandhi, the head of a political dynasty who was assassinated in 1991, have openly criticised Rao's handling of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) investigation into the 1992 scandal.

The more dangerous ones are engaged in a whisper campaign," said Sharad Yadav, deputy of the centre-left Janata Dal.

Rao's critics accuse him of rejecting the all-party JPC's findings to shield senior colleagues, including Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, from criticism. The scandal involved brokers and bankers diverting funds from the market

in government securities to

the Bombay Stock Exchange.

The issue has helped unite India's fractious opposition, which first paralysed parliament then boycotted it over its demands for the withdrawal of the "action taken report" containing the government's response to the JPC probe.

Congress dissent reached a

flashpoint on Tuesday when Surinder Singh Ahluwalia, a Sikh deputy regarded as a Sonia loyalist, accused Manmohan Singh of harming the party by his approach to the scandal probe, deputies said.

They said the finance minister had gone to the extent of threatening to resign following Ahluwalia's criticism, but was later pacified by Rao.

Junior Interior Minister of State Rajesh Pilot, another

Rajiv loyalist, had earlier proposed the resignation of all the seven ministers criticised in the JPC. But this was apparently rejected by Rao, deputies said.

Analysts say the showdown with the opposition and the chances of an open revolt within Congress could force Rao to hold early polls.

"By holding early polls he could take the steam out of the Sonia threat," communist lawmaker Saifuddin Chowdhury said.

"If this issue lingers on, it will become stronger and might demand a share in power."

The Times of India said Rao may have deliberately engineered the crisis to prepare for early polls, calculating it could put the opposition in a quandary.

**Benazir names 3 women HC judges**

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has named three women as the first High Court judges in Pakistan, reports Reuter.

The women, all lawyers, were among 20 additional judges for the Lahore High Court in the country's most populous province Punjab whose formal appointment by President Farooq Leghari was announced in a government statement on Thursday night.

Most of the 17 other new judges were also lawyers, including some prominent members of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, while some were promoted from the lower judiciary.

More women judges in the superior judiciary are likely to be appointed later in other provinces as part of Bhutto's plans to increase women's representation, government sources said.

**Dynamite blast kills 73 in South China**

BEIJING, Aug 5: Up to eight tonnes of dynamite exploded at a south China mine, killing at least 73 people and injuring another 99 in what officials today called Guangxi Province's worst mine disaster, reports Reuter.

The death toll could rise as rescue workers continued to shift through the rubble of miners' barracks and buildings flattened by the blast which happened just before midnight on Tuesday, police spokesman said.

Miners inside the barracks died instantly, as did many people outside who were knocked down by the shock wave.

**French police arrest 11 Muslim fundamentalists**

PARIS, Aug 5: French police arrested 11 Muslim fundamentalists today suspected of being close to Algeria's outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and served them with orders placing them under house arrest, Interior Ministry sources said, reports Reuter.

The police operation in Paris, the Lyon region, province and northern France, ordered by hardline Interior Minister Charles Paseau, came two days after suspected Muslim guerrillas shot dead five French government employees in a Beirut-style car bomb attempt on an embassy housing complex in Algiers.

Paseau said on television on Thursday night that French authorities would take all necessary measures and maintain "a state of vigilance" towards the Algerian fundamentalists.

**Pakistan reviews 'mango diplomacy' with India**

ISLAMABAD, Aug 5: Pakistan said on Thursday it was reviewing its so-called "mango diplomacy" with India after a controversy over crates of mangoes sent to Indian leaders on behalf of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, reports Reuter.

Some opposition politicians criticised Bhutto after press reports said she sent gift crates of quality chaunsa mangoes to Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao and 40 other Indian politicians despite tense relations between the two countries over the disputed Kashmir region.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman told reporters and inquiry had been instituted into what he called a "slip-up" but he said the matter did not affect Pakistan's policy towards India.



An elderly Japanese woman prays for Hiroshima Atomic Bomb victims at the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima yesterday, one day before A-Bomb memorial day. — AFP photo

**Off the Record****Man fined for eating expensive pet cat**

JOHANNESBURG: A hungry man trapped, clubbed to death and ate an expensive imported pet cat that was like a child to a disabled couple, a South African court heard, reports Reuter.

James Ramereki, 41, was fined 100 rand (30 dollars) after pleading guilty in court on Thursday to trapping the couple's 3,000 rand (\$850 dollars) maine coon-cat, the South African press association reported.

A tearful Mady Van Hees said the well-fed 10 kg (22 lb) cat was like a child to her and followed her wheelchair around the yard. Ramereki told the court he thought the cat was either wild or stray, it tasted like chicken, he said.

**Bacteria-Backdoor of the cafeteria!**

MANILA: How does Vice President Joseph "Erap" Estrada define the word "bacteria"? "It's the backdoor of the cafeteria," reports AP.

Estrada, a former actor and one of the country's most colourful politicians, was in rare form Friday as he autographed copies of the new book "ERAPtion," subtitled "How to speak English without really trial."

Estrada is among the few Filipino politicians who prides himself on his ability to speak English — badly. Instead, he prefers to speak in Pilipino, the country's national language favoured by millions of ordinary Filipinos.

"English is just a second language," Estrada told reporters as he autographed copies of the book. "I'm proud to speak my native tongue, which is Pilipino."

The book, written by Emil Jurado and Relli German, is a humorous collection of fractured English attributed to Estrada.

Samples:

— "A pronoun is a noun that's no longer an amateur."

— Asked why he patronises a certain restaurant, Erap says "I like the ambulance."

— On being praised for easily remembering peoples names, Erap says, "I have a pornographic memory."

Despite the jokes, Estrada won the seven-way 1992 vice presidential election with nearly twice as many votes as President Fidel Ramos.

Voters in the Philippines cast ballots separately for president and vice president.

**Crackdown on women displaying bellybuttons**

SEOUL, South Korea: Provincial city police said Friday they would continue to crack down on women whose shirts reveal their bellybuttons in spite of a recent court ruling that found the shirts legal, reports AP.

The hottest summer in nearly a century has made the short shirts hot fashion items. But some Koreans still feel revealing one's bellybutton in public is lewd and unacceptable.

The decision to continue the crackdown came after repeated phone calls from citizens asking the police to curb the "distasteful display," they said.

Last month, police in Kwangju, a southern city known for its conservatism, arrested two women wearing the so-called "bellybutton T-shirts" under a statute that bans public display of immorality.

Police appealed the decision after the court ruled in favour of the women.

**47 killed in Russian military plane crash**

MOSCOW, Aug 5: A Russian military transport plane carrying dozens of officers crashed while attempting to land in eastern Siberia early Friday, killing all 47 people aboard, officials said, reports AP.

It was the third major aviation disaster in Siberia so far this year.

The four-engine An-12 was approaching a military airport when it went down 5,000 meters (yards) short of the runway, said Col Gen Viktor Kot, the acting air force commander. He spoke to the Itar-Tass news agency.

Another military official, military district commander Valery Tretyakov, told the Interfax news agency that the plane spun around and crashed. Other officials said one or more engines had burst into flames.

**US may lift arms embargo against Bosnian Muslims**

WASHINGTON, Aug 5: Issuing a fresh threat to Bosnian Serbs, the White House warned on Thursday that the United States may defy the international arms embargo in Bosnia despite objections from United States allies, reports AP.

An increasing number of Congress members feel the embargo favours the Bosnian Serbs, who have been supplied by Yugoslavia's Serb-dominated government and enjoy an overwhelming superiority in heavy weapons.

The United States is trying to force an agreement between the Bosnian Serbs, the Muslim-led Bosnian government and the Croats.

Myers called the announcement from Yugoslavia "a positive step." She said the US will look for signs that

Yugoslavia keeps its word.

"We'll have to watch and see if that border actually seals up," she said.

For months, Clinton has sought to lift the embargo but said doing so without support from US allies would undermine peace talks and the NATO alliance.

Sen. Sam Nunn, the chief Senate negotiator, suggested that the US could withhold any financial or technical assistance to the United Nations-imposed arms embargo, according to congressional sources familiar with the negotiations.

As a further step, depending on events in Bosnia, the Pentagon could train Bosnian Muslims in the use of defensive weapons and, eventually, provide the weapons themselves.

Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters, "But the pressure may build to the point that we are forced to take that step."

Chief of Staff Leon Panetta told CNN that the Bosnian Serbs must agree to a peace settlement or "we will seek a multilateral lifting of the embargo, and if necessary a unilateral lifting of the embargo. But first we want to put maximum pressure on them to come around."

The comments came after word that Yugoslavia had severed all political and economic ties with the Bosnian Serbs, who rejected the latest international peace plan for a third time Wednesday.

Myers called the announcement from Yugoslavia "a positive step." She said the US will look for signs that

Yugoslavia keeps its word.

"We'll have to watch and see if that border actually seals up," she said.

For months, Clinton has sought to lift the embargo but said doing so without support from US allies would undermine peace talks and the NATO alliance.

Sen. Sam Nunn, the chief Senate negotiator, suggested that the US could withhold any financial or technical assistance to the United Nations-imposed arms embargo, according to congressional sources familiar with the negotiations.

As a further step, depending on events in Bosnia, the Pentagon could train Bosnian Muslims in the use of defensive weapons and, eventually, provide the weapons themselves.

Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters, "But the pressure may build to the point that we are forced to take that step."

Chief of Staff Leon Panetta told CNN that the Bosnian Serbs must agree to a peace settlement or "we will seek a multilateral lifting of the embargo, and if necessary a unilateral lifting of the embargo. But first we want to put maximum pressure on them to come around."

The comments came after word that Yugoslavia had severed all political and economic ties with the Bosnian Serbs, who rejected the latest international peace plan for a third time Wednesday.

Myers called the announcement from Yugoslavia "a positive step." She said the US will look for signs that

Yugoslavia keeps its word.

"We'll have to watch and see if that border actually seals up," she said.

For months, Clinton has sought to lift the embargo but said doing so without support from US allies would undermine peace talks and the NATO alliance.

Sen. Sam Nunn, the chief Senate negotiator, suggested that the US could withhold any financial or technical assistance to the United Nations-imposed arms embargo, according to congressional sources familiar with the negotiations.

As a further step, depending on events in Bosnia, the Pentagon could train Bosnian Muslims in the use of defensive weapons and, eventually, provide the weapons themselves.

Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters, "But the pressure may build to the point that we are forced to take that step."

Chief of Staff Leon Panetta told CNN that the Bosnian Serbs must agree to a peace settlement or "we will seek a multilateral lifting of the embargo, and if necessary a unilateral lifting of the embargo. But first we want to put maximum pressure on them to come around."

The comments came after word that Yugoslavia had severed all political and economic ties with the Bosnian Serbs, who rejected the latest international peace plan for a third time Wednesday.

Myers called the announcement from Yugoslavia "a positive step." She said the US will look for signs that

Yugoslavia keeps its word.

"We'll have to watch and see if that border actually seals up," she said.

For months, Clinton has sought to lift the embargo but said doing so without support from US allies would undermine peace talks and the NATO alliance.

Sen. Sam Nunn, the chief Senate negotiator, suggested that the US could withhold any financial or technical assistance to the United Nations-imposed arms embargo, according to congressional sources familiar with the negotiations.

As a further step, depending on events in Bosnia, the Pentagon could train Bosnian Muslims in the use of defensive weapons and, eventually, provide the weapons themselves.

Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters, "But the pressure may build to the point that we are forced to take that step."

Chief of Staff Leon Panetta told CNN that the Bosnian Serbs must agree to a peace settlement or "we will seek a multilateral lifting of the embargo, and if necessary a unilateral lifting of the embargo. But first we want to put maximum pressure on them to come around."

The comments came after word that Yugoslavia had severed all political and economic ties with the Bosnian Serbs, who rejected the latest international peace plan for a third time Wednesday.

Myers called the announcement from Yugoslavia "a positive step." She said the US will look for signs that

Yugoslavia keeps its word.

"We'll have to watch and see if that border actually seals up," she said.

For months, Clinton has sought to lift the embargo but said doing so without support from US allies would undermine peace talks and the NATO alliance.

Sen. Sam Nunn, the chief Senate negotiator, suggested that the US could withhold any financial or technical assistance to the United Nations-imposed arms embargo, according to congressional sources familiar with the negotiations.

As a further step, depending on events in Bosnia, the Pentagon could train Bosnian Muslims in the use of defensive weapons and, eventually, provide the weapons themselves.

Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters, "But the pressure may build to the point that we are forced to take that step."

&lt;p