

US honours Suu Kyi

Ends sanctions on Myanmar leaders

AFP, Washington

The United States lifted sanctions on two of Myanmar's top leaders as the Congress hailed Aung San Suu Kyi as a hero of democracy in a lavish ceremony unthinkable only months ago.

The move to end the sanctions on Myanmar President Thein Sein and parliamentary speaker Thura Shwe Mann came Wednesday, just hours after Suu Kyi had called for US sanctions crippling her impoverished nation to be lifted.

She also met fellow Nobel Peace laureate President Barack Obama for the first time, after being presented with the Congressional Gold Medal in the imposing surroundings of the historical Rotunda on Capitol Hill.

The White House said Obama reaffirmed US support for political and economic reforms in Myanmar, and full protection of human rights, in order to shape "a more peaceful, free and prosperous future" for the country.

Myanmar was ruled by an iron-fisted junta for decades but, since taking office last year, a

reformist government under former general Thein Sein has freed political prisoners and allowed Suu Kyi's party into electoral politics.

"This is one of the most moving days in my life," said Suu Kyi, who modestly described herself as "a stranger from a distant land."

"From the depths of my heart I thank you, the people of America... for keeping us in your hearts and minds during the dark years when freedom and justice seemed beyond our reach," Suu Kyi said, as she was handed the award.

"We believe that we can go forward in unity and in peace," the Nobel Peace Prize laureate said.

Freed in 2010 after 15 years under house arrest, Suu Kyi received a rapturous welcome on her first visit to Washington since her release.

"It's almost too delicious to believe, my friend, that you are here in the rotunda of our great Capitol, the centerpiece of our democracy, as an elected member of your parliament," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said.

But Hillary said a different phase of Suu Kyi's work was just beginning as she helps build democracy in Myanmar.



PHOTO: AFP

Myanmar's Member of Parliament and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi holds the Congressional Gold Medal as she poses with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Washington, DC yesterday.



Actress in anti-Islam film sues producer

AFP, Jerusalem

Egypt and Jordan could annul their peace treaties with Israel if it carries out a preemptive strike against Iran, US officials have warned the Jewish state, an Israeli newspaper reported yesterday.

Quoting a high-level Israeli official, Yediot Aharanot said Washington had warned the Jewish state that Arab leaders would not be able to control an angry public backlash if Israel were to mount an attack on Iran.

The newspaper said the US official pointed to the violent response in several Middle Eastern countries to a film insulting Islam, saying: "Today the Arab leaders do not control their peoples, the streets control the leaders."

"An Israeli strike is just what the Iranians need. The entire Arab and Muslim street will take to the streets to demonstrate," the official said.

"What happened with the film against Mohammed is just a preview of what will happen in case of an Israeli strike," he said, referring to the unrest which has spread across the Muslim world, which has so far left more than 30 people dead.

The official said that Egypt and Jordan, the only Arab countries that have signed peace treaties with Israel, would face enormous pressure to annul the accords if Iran's nuclear facilities were attacked.

Israel, the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear power, has said it cannot rule out preemptive military action against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Israel and much of the international community believes that Iran's nuclear programme masks a weapons drive, a charge denied by Tehran.

Cindy Lee Garcia is one of three actresses in the film to have come forward with similar accusations since the explosion of violence that ripped through Muslim countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia last week.

Garcia has sued in a Los Angeles court on grounds of invasion of privacy, fraud, slander and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

She is targeting Nakoula Basseley Nakoula, a 55-year-old Egyptian Copt and convicted fraudster -- out on parole -- who lives in Los Angeles and has admitted to working on the film, "Innocence of Muslims."

US media say Nakoula wrote and produced the film, using the pseudonym Sam Bacile before being identified. He was questioned overnight Friday by police before going into hiding with his family.

Garcia is also suing YouTube and its owner Google for releasing excerpts of the very amateurish film.

However, the Californian court denied the request of removing the film, saying it violates one's freedom of expression.

Garcia is seeking a permanent injunction removing the video from YouTube and says her career and reputation have been ruined.

More than 30 people have been killed in attacks and violent protests linked to the film "Innocence of Muslims".

Romney slams Obama's 'web of dependency'

AFP, Miami

Mitt Romney has accused President Barack Obama of fostering a "web of dependency" amid an increasingly bitter electoral battle over their competing visions of the government's role in society.

Under attack over videotaped comments dismissing 47 percent of Americans as freeloaders relying on government handouts, the Republican presidential nominee regrouped and insisted his policies would help the entire country to prosper.

"My course for the American economy will encourage private investment and personal freedom," Romney wrote in an opinion piece Wednesday in USA Today.

"Instead of creating a web of dependency, I will pursue policies that grow our economy and lift Americans out of poverty," he said.

Bill Gates tops Forbes rich list

BBC ONLINE

Technology titan Bill Gates has been listed by Forbes magazine as the wealthiest American for the 19th year in a row, with a fortune of \$66bn (£41bn), up \$7bn from last year.

There was no change in the order of the top five richest from a year earlier.

The total wealth of the US super-rich grew 13% to \$1.7tn, with the top 400 worth an average \$400m more in 2012.

The group's assets are worth as much as one eighth of the US economy, and grew much faster than the economy at large.

According to the Forbes 400 list of the richest people in America, the average net worth of a person on the list was \$4.2bn.

In second place with a fortune of \$46bn was investment guru Warren Buffett, who is chairman and chief executive of the insurance conglomerate Berkshire Hathaway.

He was followed by Larry Ellison, head of software maker Oracle Corp, worth \$41bn.

David and Charles Koch of the energy and chemical business group Koch Industries were tied in fourth place with \$31bn.

The majority of those on Forbes' list became richer in 2012. Two hundred and forty-one members of the group saw their wealth increase, while just 66 saw it shrink.

Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and financier George Soros dropped from the ranks of the top 10 into 12th place compared with a year ago.



Strike on Iran may wreck Arab treaties US warns Israel

AFP, Jerusalem

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Samajwadi Party workers burning an effigy of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the tracks as they stop a train in Allahabad yesterday. Opposition parties and trade unions called for shopkeepers, traders and labourers in India to block railway lines and close markets to protest against reforms, designed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, to revive India's slowing economy through allowing foreign retail giants such as Walmart and Tesco.

No poverty

FROM PAGE 20

addressed the meeting.

"Our prime and foremost goal is to create an environment so that every people of Bangladesh lives in peace," Hasina told the meeting.

The premier said her government was trying to produce more food in the country's northern region, and for this reason the government had taken initiative for cultivation of maize in the area in larger scale.

She extended her sincere thanks to the people of Lalmonirhat for lending their overwhelming support in the general election of 2008.

Renewing her firm commitment to continue democracy in the country, Hasina said no one will be able to play with the fate of the people of Bangladesh.

"We have strengthened democracy through the 15th amendment of the constitution... now the people of Bangladesh will live keeping their heads high," she told the public gathering.

UN chief

FROM PAGE 20

headquarters in New York.

"Freedom of expression, while it is a fundamental right and privilege, should not be abused by such people, by such a disgraceful and shameful act."

The Internet video -- which portrays the Prophet Mohammad as a fraud-sparked violent protests across the Muslim world, including an attack on a US consulate in Benghazi, Libya that left four Americans dead, including US ambassador Chris Stevens.

And a French weekly on Tuesday published defamatory cartoons of the prophet fuelling the already ripe anti-West sentiment in the Muslim world.

More protests were held in Pakistan, Nigeria, Indonesia, Iran and other parts of the world as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has warned that the cartoons would trigger a new wave of anti-Western violence.

The United States yesterday warned its citizens to avoid travel to Pakistan but stopped short of recommending Americans avoid travelling there.

In Pakistan, protest turned violent as police fired live rounds and tear gas to break up a crowd of around 1,000 students, many armed with wooden clubs, protesting in Islamabad. Thousands of Muslims marched in the Nigerian city of Zaria and burnt US and Israeli flags to protest the movie.

Angry protests linked to the movie have left more than 30 people dead since last week, with much of the violence targeting the United States where the film was produced.

French ministers fear the focus could now shift to Paris's overseas outposts following the publications of the cartoons in the French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo.

Embassies, consulates and international French schools in around 20 Muslim countries will be closed today for fear of retaliatory violence.

Khaleda rejects full SC verdict

FROM PAGE 1

the prime minister's recent statements on polls-time administration, and is inconsistent with the short order, the BNP chief said at a crowded press conference at her Gulshan office in the capital.

"This unethical and politically motivated verdict is ineffective due to logical grounds. It will create instability and aggravate political crisis," said the leader of the opposition in parliament.

The verdict will not be able to hamper the ongoing movement against the government, she added.

Khaleda accused former chief justice ABM Khairul Haque (chief justice when the short order was given) of bringing "unethical changes" in the full text of the verdict on the constitution's 13th amendment

cancellation.

Differences are clear between the short order and the full text of the verdict, and this amounts to judicial misconduct. A retired judge cannot write a verdict but Khairul Haque did that. The verdict is biased, unacceptable and cancelable," she said.

Khaleda added, "In the recent verdict [full text] the former chief justice gave the directive for a caretaker government with elected representatives, which is a direct reflection of the prime minister's statement and contradictory to his previous order. Such biased attitude of the judge is a serious judicial misconduct."

In the full text of its verdict, the SC said the next two elections may be held under caretaker government to restore the caretaker system.

Asked about the consequence of the rigid stances of

prising lawmakers.

Khaleda once again asserted this at yesterday's press conference.

Recently, during her UK visit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina proposed formation of a small cabinet, that would also include BNP representatives, to oversee the election. And on Wednesday, she announced in parliament that the next election would be held after dissolution of the House.

On Hasina's latest statement, Khaleda said it is nothing but an attempt to mislead the people. "She [PM] is managing a stage-managed election while staying in power. But our position is clear. There is no alternative to a non-party neutral government. People will not accept election under a political government."

"Such dissimilarity between the short order delivered in the court [SC] and the full text [of verdict] is unprecedented. Undoubtedly, it has been done to implement an ill political motive," said the former prime minister.

Khaleda alleged that the proposals in favour of the government stance showed that he [Khairul Haque] has rewritten the verdict to fulfil the government's desire.

Bitterly criticising the former chief justice, Khaleda said in the May 10 (last year) short order, he said the 10th and 11th parliament elections can be held under caretaker government, but in the full text he changed his stance and proposed holding election under a political government.

"Such dissimilarity between the short order delivered in the court [SC] and the full text [of verdict] is unprecedented. Undoubtedly, it has been done to implement an ill political motive," said the former prime minister.

Senior BNP leaders including acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir were present at the press briefing.

Electricity went off at least 10 times during the briefing.

Five charged

FROM PAGE 20

31 people as prosecution witnesses.

The five accused are Mohammad Al Amin, Saiful Islam Momin, Rafiqul Islam Khokon, Selim Chowdhury and Akbar Ali Lalu.

Of them, Selim is on the run. And the others were earlier arrested and are now in custody.

The charges against the killers have been proved and they should be brought to trial, said the IO in the charge sheet.

The IO appealed to the court to issue an arrest warrant for Selim, who comes from Bholia, and an order to attach his properties.

Khalefa, 45, worked at the consular section of the Saudi embassy. He was shot dead in a mugging incident near his Gulshan house in the small hours of March 6.

Two of the accused -- Al Amin and Lalu -- had earlier confessed to their involvement, saying they had killed the victim when he refused to give them the dollars they wanted.

NEWS IN brief

Air strike kills 54 civilians in Syria

AFP, Damascus

At least 54 civilians were reported killed yesterday in a massive explosion in northeast Syria and as state media blamed a helicopter gunship crash on an accident but monitors said rebels shot it down.

Dozens more people were wounded in the blast at a petrol station in the northeastern village of Ain Issa, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Activists said the petrol station in the village of Ain Issa, in Raqa province, was hit by a warplane.

Earlier, the Observatory reported the helicopter had been downed by rebels following a series of explosions in the restive town of Douma, northeast

Karzai sacks 5 governors

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President