

ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

Abbas calls for renewed talks, slams aggression

US condemns move; Britain urges reconsideration

AFP, New York

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas called on Friday for a return to peace talks, but slammed Israel's latest plans to build 3000 settler homes in reaction to a United Nations vote recognising Palestine as a non-member state.

"I've said a thousand times that we want to resume negotiations and we are ready to do it," Abbas told reporters in New York.

"We are not setting any condition but there are at least 15 UN resolutions which consider settlement activity as illegal and an obstacle to peace which must be removed," he said. "Why do (the Israelis) not stop settlement?"

Israeli media reports said that some new settlement construction would be in a highly contentious area of the West Bank known as E1, a corridor that runs between the eastern-most edge of annexed east Jerusalem and the Maaleh Adumim settlement.

Palestinians bitterly oppose the E1 project, as it effectively cuts the occupied West Bank in two, north to south, and makes the creation of a viable Palestinian state highly problematic.

PALESTINE'S LAND LOSS



In the landmark Thursday vote in New York, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly backed a resolution recognising Palestine within the 1967 borders as a non-member observer state.

Israel lashed out in response on Friday, with an official confirming to AFP plans to build 3,000 settler homes in east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Palestine Liberation Organisation official Hanan Ashrawi reacted by telling AFP "it is an act of Israeli aggression against a state, and the

world needs to take up its responsibilities."

Israel's main ally the United States and Britain also criticised the decision on new homes citing this will hamper peace efforts.

The move was also denounced by Peace Now, Israel's settlement watchdog.

"Instead of punishing the Palestinians, this government is punishing Israel by making peace harder to achieve and showing that Israel does not want peace," said spokeswoman Hagit Ofra. "That is very dangerous."

Israeli rights group Yesh Din said the plan amounted to "collective punishment trampling Palestinian human rights".

Israel has long feared that if the Palestinians won the rank of a UN non-member state, they could pursue the Jewish state for war crimes at the International Criminal Court in The Hague -- particularly over settlement.

With their newly acquired status, the Palestinians now have access to a range of UN agencies as well as to the ICC, but Abbas said he had no plans to immediately petition the tribunal, unless new Israeli aggression.

US laws could gut-punch Palestinians

AFP, Washington

Approval of Palestinian non-member UN status this week provoked no US funding ban on the United Nations, but irate US lawmakers have introduced measures that would do dramatic fiscal harm to the Palestinians and could also target the global body.

The upgrade from "observer entity" to "non-member observer state" marked a diplomatic triumph for Palestinian Authority (PA) president Mahmud Abbas, but he will have the unenviable task of watching out for vindictiveness on Capitol Hill, and navigating tough new restrictions should the proposals become law.

"Nothing that happened yesterday triggers any sanction under existing law," Lara Friedman, director of policy relations at Americans for Peace Now, who is tracking Palestinian-related legislation in the US Congress, told AFP Friday.

The concern, Friedman said, is with three new measures, all added into a defense spending bill set for a Senate vote next week, which could slash funding to Palestinian organizations, the United Nations and its entities, and even countries that support a Palestine status upgrade.

In other words, the potential exists for far more serious funding cuts in the future than the rescinding of some \$60 million in US dues for UNESCO when it admitted Palestine as a member state 13 months ago.

Some \$200 million of the pledged US aid is urgent as "direct budget support" for the PA, the State Department said.

Another amendment, filed by Republican Orrin Hatch hours before the UN vote, sought to eliminate all US funding to the United Nations if it changed Palestine's "current status."

A third amendment would slash US aid to Palestinians by half if the PA seeks a UN status upgrade "after November 25." The UN vote came on the 29th.

It would also cut US aid by 20 percent to any country which votes to upgrade Palestinian status.

But George Ingram, who spent 20 years as a congressional aide, said such legislation is often crafted with a waiver that allows the president to override the law, often for what is deemed the interest of the United States.

Palestinian history

1917 Britain supports creation of Jewish home in Palestine. Jewish immigration surges

November 29, 1947 The UN partitions Palestine into an Arab state (44%) and a Jewish one (56%)

May 14-15, 1948 Zionist leader David Ben Gurion proclaims the independence of Israel. Arab nations invade the new state

1950 Jordan annexes the West Bank. Egypt takes control of the Gaza Strip

1964 Palestine Liberation Organisation is created

March 1977 Egypt and Israel sign peace treaty

1982 Israel invades Lebanon

1987-1993 1st Palestinian intifada (uprising)

1988 Palestinian declaration of independence

September 13, 1993 1st Oslo Peace Accord

March 1997 Israel lifts freeze on new settlements in the West Bank

June, 1967 Six Day War. Israel seizes Gaza, the Sinai, Golan Heights, W. Bank and E. Jerusalem

October 1973 Arabs launch Yom Kippur War over lands lost in 1967. Israel extends territorial gains but is left dependent on the US for support

November 1974 PLO leader Yasser Arafat urges peace in a speech at the United Nations

2000-2005 2nd Palestinian intifada

October 29, 2004 Yasser Arafat dies. Mahmoud Abbas becomes PLO leader

2005 Israel withdraws from Gaza

2006-2012 Four Israeli offensives on Gaza

November 29, 2012 UN accepts Palestine as a non-member observer state

PHOTO: AFP

No direct entry for Palestinians: IMF

AFP, Washington

The International Monetary Fund said Friday that the UN vote to recognize Palestine as a non-member observer state does not mean the Palestinians will automatically become members of the financial institution.

In response to an AFP query, spokeswoman Wafa Amr said United Nations recognition "by itself has no direct effect on a possible application for membership of the IMF."

"The Fund has its own procedures for determining membership, which include the requirement that Fund members representing a majority of the Fund's voting power recognize the applicant to the Fund as a 'country'."

NEWS IN brief

New leader takes charge in Mexico

AFP, Mexico City

Mexico's incoming president Enrique Pena Nieto took the reins of power early yesterday, inheriting a country full of economic promise but beset by a brutal drug war.

Outgoing President Felipe Calderon handed power to Pena Nieto in a symbolic ceremony just after midnight, hours before the new leader takes the formal oath of office before congress and delivers a speech at the national palace.

Kuwait goes to divisive poll

AFP, Kuwait City

Kuwaitis cast ballots yesterday to elect a second parliament in 10 months, but early turnout was low as voters appeared to heed an opposition call to shun the poll over a disputed electoral law.

The vote comes nearly two months after Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah dissolved the pro-government parliament after it was reinstated in June by a court ruling that also annulled an assembly elected in February.

Landslides kill 12 in Pak Kashmir

AFP, Islamabad

At least 12 people have been killed, including eight Pakistani soldiers, and nine people are missing after being hit by landslides in the mountainous Kashmir region, officials said on Saturday.

Local officials said they were searching for more dead bodies.

Mechanic win \$293m US lottery

AFP, Chicago

A Missouri mechanic and his unemployed wife came forward Friday as holders of one of two winning tickets in the second largest lottery in US history: a \$587.5 million Powerball jackpot.

Mark and Cindy Hill vowed to stay grounded and not let the massive windfall go to their heads after receiving a check for \$293,750,000 at a press conference in their local high school in Dearborn, Missouri.

Curfew lifted in Srinagar

PTI, Srinagar

With the situation returning to normal, Indian authorities yesterday lifted the three-day-old curfew imposed in nine police station areas of the city following sectarian clashes.

Curfew was on Wednesday after sectarian clashes broke out in Hawal area of the city. Hawal, Gojwara and adjoining areas have become flash points for sectarian violence over the past couple of years during Muharram processions.

N Korea sets date for rocket launch

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday announced an imminent rocket launch in a move sure to draw stern US and UN condemnation and rack up tensions with South Korea which is just days from a presidential election.

In a statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the Korean Committee for Space Technology said the new bid would be

US Senate okays new Iran sanctions

AFP, Washington

The US Senate unanimously approved new economic sanctions Friday aimed at further crippling Iran's energy, shipping and port sectors.

The amendment, tacked onto a sweeping defense spending bill being debated by the chamber, passed 94-0 and should sail through the House of Representatives.

The vote came on the same day a defiant Iran denied it was pursuing nuclear weapons and threatened to withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which aims to stop the spread of atomic weapons.

BRITISH PRESS REFORM

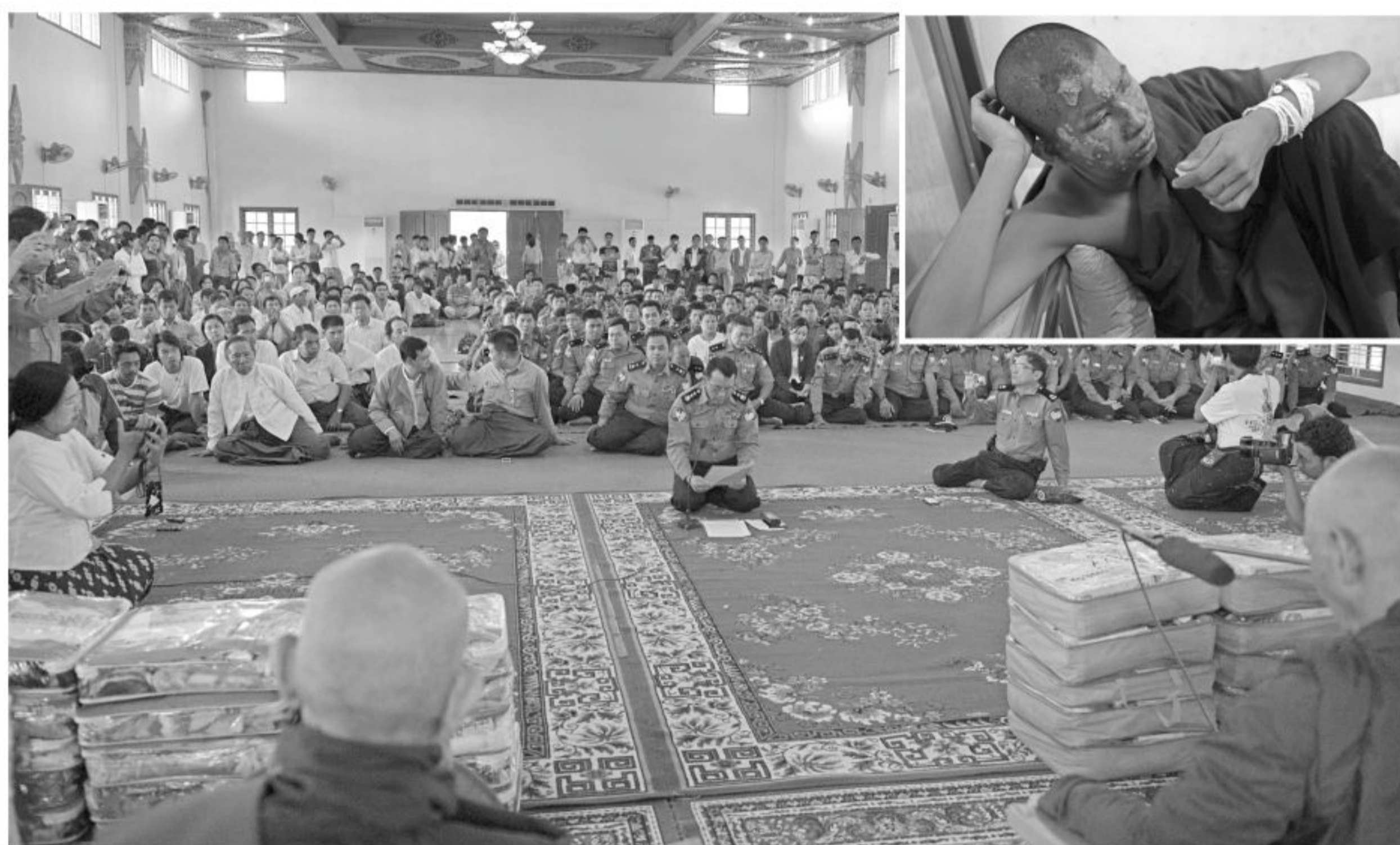
JK Rowling slams PM's stand

AFP, London

Harry Potter creator JK Rowling accused British Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday of betraying victims of press intrusion after he opposed calls by a major inquiry for laws to regulate newspapers.

Rowling, who told the Leveson Inquiry last year that journalists had repeatedly invaded her children's privacy, said Cameron had let down people like her who had decided to testify about press misconduct.

"I am alarmed and dismayed that the prime minister appears to be backing away from assurances he made at the



Police Colonel Sann Yu, centre, Sagaing Division Police chief, addresses Buddhist monks during a meeting held in the wake of a crackdown on a protest at a Chinese-backed copper mine in northern Myanmar, in Monywa, northern Myanmar yesterday. Police apologised for injuring scores of monks in the crackdown, but tensions over the pre-dawn raid remained high. Inset, an injured monk.

PHOTO: AFP

Syria remains cut off from Internet, phone access

AFP, Damascus

Syrian Internet and mobile phone links remained cut for a third straight day yesterday, an AFP correspondent in Damascus reported, amid US accusations the government is deliberately seeking to deprive the opposition of communications.

But activists and human rights monitors said that ordinary civilians were harder hit by the blackout than the opposition as they unable to use cellphones even to call for emergency assistance in the event of casualties from the persistent violence rocking the country.

An activist in a rebel-held area of Syria contacted by AFP from Beirut said that it was primarily people in areas still under government control who were affected by the blackout.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon said the conflict had reached "appalling heights of brutality" as at least 122 people were killed on Friday, including 73 civilians and 22 fighters from neighbouring Lebanon.



JK Rowling

outset of the Leveson inquiry," the author said in a statement on the website of Hacked Off, a group for victims of press intrusion

A probe on Thursday suggested that there should be a new independent self-regulatory body for the British press that is underpinned by new legislation.

Cameron, a Conservative, immediately warned that new laws could threaten press freedom -- setting up a clash with the Liberal Democrat deputy prime minister of his coalition government, Nick Clegg, and with the opposition Labour party.

Part ways with Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1

"Read the minds of people... discard the war criminals," she told a public rally at Moulvibazar Govt High School ground during her daylong visit to the south-eastern district.

The premier also warned BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia of legal action on corruption and nepotism charges.

Hasina again blasted the BNP for launching anti-government campaigns in the month of December, coinciding with the victory anniversary celebrations. "Don't try to protect them [those undergoing trial for crimes against humanity in 1971] as people of independent Bangladesh won't accept it," she said.

Chaired by Chief Whip and Moulvibazar District Awami League President Abdus Shahid, the rally was also addressed by AL General Secretary Syed Ashraful Islam, minister without portfolio Suranjit Sengupta, Sylhet Mayor Badruddin Ahmed Kamran and MPs from the Sylhet Division.

Referring to the opposition leader's claim that her two sons had been living an honest life, Hasina said the money which was earlier siphoned off by Khaleda's younger son was brought back to the country just two days after she had claimed so.

"Now, her [Khaleda's] elder son is leading a luxurious life in London. Could I ask about the source of his

money? How could an honest man lead such a luxurious life abroad?" asked Hasina.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated a 50-bed upazila health complex and laid the foundation stone of Vice-Principal Md Abdus Shahid College and Srimongal union parishad complex under Srimongal.

During the visit, Hasina inaugurated 250-bed Moulvibazar Hospital, local Met Office and newly-constructed polytechnic institute. She also laid the foundation stones of chief judicial magistrate building, Jatiya Mahila Sangstha building, technical training centre and Moulvibazar Muktiyoddha Sangsad Bhaban in the district headquarters.

I K Gujral cremated with full state honours

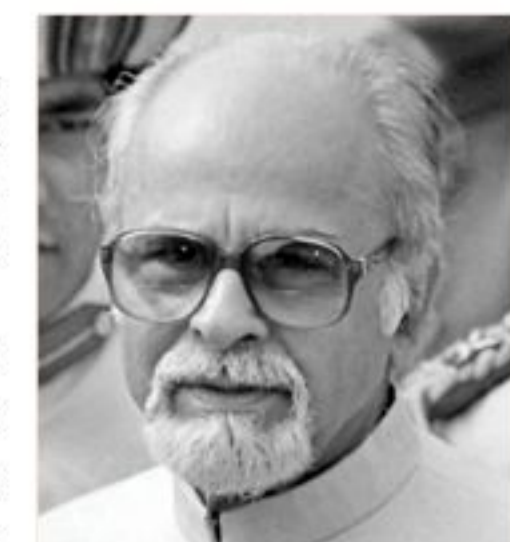
OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's former prime minister I K Gujral, who died on Friday, was cremated here yesterday with full state honours.

Amid prayers and a 21-gun salute, his body was consigned to flames at Smriti Sthal on the banks of Yamuna river where President, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Vice President Hamid Ansari and UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi were also present.

Awami League presidium member Kazi Zafarullah and Liberation War Affairs Minister Tajul Islam also attended the cremation of Gujral as representatives of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government.

An array of Indian cabinet ministers and



political leaders and some senior bureaucrats attended the cremation.

Diplomats from various countries were also present.

The body of Gujral, draped in tricolour, was brought to the cremation site from his residence in a flower-bedecked gun carriage accompanied by military personnel and close

family members.

Officers from the three armed forces carried on their shoulders the body of Gujral to the cremation ground as he was accorded a state funeral.

Gujral, who was prime minister between 1997 and 1998 leading coalition government, was known for 'Gujral Doctrine' of five principles for maintaining India's good relations with neighbouring countries.