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Kerala Assembly Budget session off to a stormy start

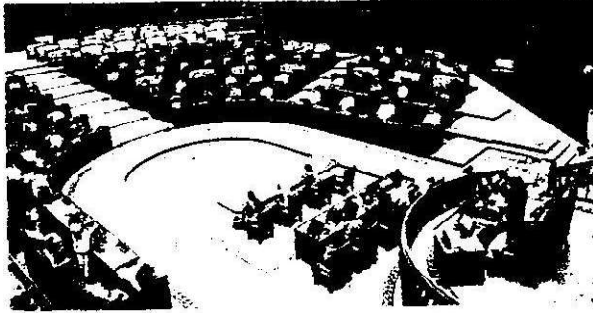
Opposition boycotts Governor's address, seeks Speaker's resignation

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The 14th Kerala Legislative Assembly's final Budget session got off to a tumultuous start with the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Opposition boycotting Governor Arif Mohammad Khan's policy address.

Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala set the tone for what portends to be a stormy month-long sitting ahead of the Assembly polls in mid-May by questioning the constitutional propriety of Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan - who is facing allegations in connection with the dollar smuggling case - chairing the session.

Speaking out of turn at the start of the Governor's address, Mr. Chennithala said the Speaker was under a cloud of suspicion. The Op-



Tense hour: Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan addressing the Assembly in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday.

position had moved a statutory resolution under Article 179 of the Constitution to remove Mr. Sreeramakrishnan from the Speaker's office on the charge of lowering the House's esteem by associating with gold smugglers. Mr. Sreeramakrishnan had forfeited his right to share the dais with the Governor.

Mr. Chennithala also

called the Pinarayi Vijayan government irredeemably corrupt.

Following his cue, UDF legislators raised slogans and placards against the Chief Minister and Speaker. Mr. Khan objected to the commotion caused by the UDF. He halted his address twice and implored the Opposition to allow him to read the pol-

icy speech without interruption.

"Honourable members, I am doing my constitutional duty. It is expected no impediment be created when the Governor is performing his constitutional duty. You have raised your objection. Now allow me to discharge my constitutional obligation," he said.

Mr. Chennithala, in turn, sought Mr. Khan's leave to discharge his responsibility as Leader of the Opposition. UDF legislators persisted in their protests for about 10 minutes before trooping out of the House. Later, they staged a sit-in on the steps leading to the Assembly chamber.

The sole Bharatiya Janata Party legislator, O. Rajagopal, sat through the proceedings.