

The Daily Star

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6 years for Anwar



KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 14: Malaysia's ousted deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim was sentenced today to six years in jail for corruption, a defence lawyer said, reports AFP.

all four charges involving allegations that he used his position to cover up claims of sexual misconduct which he has blamed on a high-level political conspiracy.

Defence lawyer Pawancheek Marican said Anwar was jailed for six years on each count, with the sentences to run concurrently.

Pawancheek said the lawyers would lodge an appeal "later" but did not elaborate.

The official news agency Bernama said Judge Augustine Paul delivered the verdict half an hour after the hearing began.

The charges carried a maximum penalty of 14 years with a one-third remission for good behaviour.

As news of the verdict emerged, police used water cannon to break up a protest by Anwar supporters who gathered

Anwar was found guilty of

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Children perform dance at the Shishu Academy to observe the Bengali New Year. —Star Photo: Amran Hossain

Benazir jailed, fined, banned from politics

Kickbacks on government contracts cost the former Pakistan prime minister dearly

ISLAMABAD, Apr 15: A Pakistani court today sentenced former prime minister Benazir Bhutto to five years in jail, disqualified her from politics and fined her 8.6 million dollar, the state-run news agency reported, says AP.

There was no immediate comment from Benazir, who is not currently in Pakistan or from her Pakistan People's Party.

The Rawalpindi branch of the Lahore High Court sentenced Benazir, her jailed husband Asif Ali Zardari to five years jail on a charge of corruption.

The state-run Associated Press of Pakistan said that the 'short order' of the Lahore High Court found Benazir and her husband guilty of taking kickbacks on government contracts.

Benazir can appeal her conviction.

Benazir was abruptly dismissed from power in 1996 on charges of rampant corruption, economic incompetence and sanctioning police hit squads in her home town of Karachi in southern Sindh province.



Benazir has steadfastly maintained her innocence.

In recent weeks she has held several news conferences to complain that she is not receiving a fair trial. She accused the judge of being biased against her and denying her lawyers an opportunity to present her defence.

She took her complaint to the Supreme Court which ordered the lower court to head Benazir's defence. She also complained bitterly that her lawyers have been harassed by police and intelligence agents. Their cars followed her.

Her case complained that her car was routinely searched and police officers had orders to harass her in an attempt to intimidate her.

The government denied the charges.

Her husband, who has been criticized even by her supporters as corrupt, has been in jail since Benazir's government was dismissed.

Benazir faces five other charges of corruption all stemming from her term in office.

Her earlier term in power also came to a sudden end in August 1990 after only 20 months in power. Then too Benazir and her husband were charged with abusing their power, corruption and economic mismanagement. However no charges were ever proven.

BNP responds to pressure from within

By Nazmul Ashraf and Rezaul Karim

Finding the prospects of an out-government agitation gloomy at the moment, BNP is protesting about issues of public concern and this, the party believes, will help secure increased public support ahead of the Upazila Parishad elections.

In the face of mounting pressure from within, the main opposition party is strongly considering contesting the upazilla polls and cashing in on the current power-water crisis and the deteriorating law and order situation to gain advantage in the crucial local polls, party sources said.

The change in the BNP policy started taking root since party chief Khaleda Zia consulted some central leaders on her course of action on April 1.

The April 1 meeting was critical of BNP's boycott of the recent municipal polls and strongly suggested that the party contest the coming upazilla elections.

Khaleda also met her advisers and the key party leaders on April 11 and again on April 14 when she also heard, among other issues, suggestions regarding participation in the upazilla polls. The meetings felt that matters of public interests should be the basis of the anti-government agitation in order to give the movement greater credibility.

Assigned by Khaleda, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan also held similar discussions with the party's senior leaders and its representatives to the opposition liaison committee on April 2 and 7.

Views for upazilla polls also came up prominently in the secretary general-led discussions, insiders said.

Many in the BNP still believe that the party's allied movement with three other opposition parties — Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and IOJ — against the February 23-25 municipal elections proved to be a

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Vajpayee faces trust vote tomorrow

President tells BJP to prove majority as coalition partner withdraws support

NEW DELHI, Apr 15: The government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today moved a confidence motion in Lok Sabha, lower house of Indian parliament, which will decide its fate on Saturday.

But there was little indication as to how the ruling coalition would prove its majority with the parliamentary arithmetic not in favour of it, at least on paper.

Responding promptly to a directive from President K R Narayanan, Vajpayee moved the trust motion this morning which was taken up suspending all other business before the house when it reassembled after nearly a month-long recess.

The Prime Minister, who moved the motion after his government was reduced to minority following withdrawal of support to it by Jayalalitha-led AIADMK, a key constituent of India's ruling alliance, yesterday, told the house that his 13-month-old government would emerge triumphant in the trial of strength.

He said while the opposition wanted to topple his government it was far from clear what would happen after that. The opposition must tell the nation who would be their leader and what would be their programmes and policies if they formed an alternative, Vajpayee said.

On the other hand, the leader of the opposition Sharad Pawar (Congress), who initiated the debate on the confidence motion, attacked the Vajpayee government saying it had no achievement to its credit during 13 months of governance and lost the right to remain in power.

Pawar was particularly critical of the government on the issue of attacks on minorities.

Seeking to put up a counter to the opposition, Home Minister and senior BJP leader L K Advani said no alternative government could be formed due to "inherent contradictions" in the opposition camp.

With the ruling BJP and its allies and the opposition keeping their cards close to their chests, it was not clear which way the trust vote would go.

President Narayanan asked Vajpayee to seek the confidence vote hours after Jayalalitha withdrew the support of her party's eighteen MPs yesterday.

After the withdrawal of support, a joint delegation of mainstream opposition, including the Congress, met the President and requested him to direct the Vajpayee to seek a trust vote.

The President's directive upset the BJP's strategy of forcing the opposition to move a no-confidence motion and seek to focus on differences among opposition parties on this issue.

The Vajpayee government has sought the support of Dravidian Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the party which rules southern state of Tamil Nadu and is the principal political foe of AIADMK, and some other smaller regional outfits like Indian National Lok Dal headed by Om Prakash Chautala and Bahujan Samaj Party led by Kanshi Ram. The DMK has six members, Lok Dal four and BSP five in the Lok Sabha.

But none of these parties have so far held out firm assurance, at least publicly, of extending support to the confidence motion.

Meanwhile, leaders of major opposition parties continued their efforts to cobble up a non-BJP alternative in spite of differences of opinion among them on the exact character of the alternative and who would be its head.

In a significant development, the Congress has shifted from its earlier stand that it would prefer to form an alternative on its own supported from outside by non-BJP parties and agreed to consider a coalition. Its earlier stand had come in for criticism from a section of the opposition.

But the Congress still seems undecided on whether to lead a coalition government or form a minority government supported by non-BJP parties. This was indicated by Jayalalitha after her 80-minute meeting with Congress President Sonia Gandhi at the latter's residence this evening.

Islamabad's second missile in 48 hours

Shaheen follows Ghouri in response to Delhi's Agni II

ISLAMABAD, Apr 15: Pakistan tested a second nuclear capable missile today upping the ante in the missile race with its uneasy neighbour India, reports AP.

The newest missile was the Shaheen I, the first in a new series of missiles, with a range of 750 kilometres (450 miles), said military and government officials. This is considerably less than the Ghauri II ballistic missile which Pakistan tested on Wednesday.

The Ghauri II, which has a range of 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles), was tested in response to a similar test carried out by India last Sunday. The Ghauri II, like the new Shaheen missile can carry a nuclear or conventional payload of 1,000 kilograms (2,200 pounds).

The missile was tested at 9:58 am (04:58 GMT) and it was a success, said an official at Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission, which conducted the latest missile test.

"These flight tests have strengthened national security and will help in maintaining a strategic balance in South Asia," said a foreign ministry statement issued soon after the test.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said yesterday that the range of a Ghauri-II missile successfully tested could be extended to 2,300 km (1,437 miles) by adjusting its payload.

Sharif told journalists at the coastal town of Gwadar, close to where the missile landed, that the Ghauri-II's normal range was 2,000 km (1,250 miles). Pakistan's test matched Sunday's test of the Agni-II ballistic

weapon by arch-foe India.

It was the first official confirmation that Pakistan had tested an upgraded version of the Ghauri missile it first test-fired exactly one year ago.

The range of the modified weapon put all major Indian cities within range of Pakistan's military.

Sharif said the Ghauri-II flew for 12 minutes before hitting a target near Dwani, another coastal town in Pakistan's sparsely populated Baluchistan province, site of last May's nuclear tests by Pakistan.

Officials said the test was conducted at the Sonmiani naval base, in southwestern Baluchistan province, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) from Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi.

It wasn't immediately clear why Pakistan chose to conduct a second test or whether it would prompt India to respond.

The foreign ministry statement said the Shaheen test "concludes, for now, the series of ... flight tests involving solid and liquid fuel rocket motor technologies, which started yesterday."

But the missile testing in South Asia, a region that openly possesses the ability to make nuclear bombs, appears to be launching Pakistan and India on a full-blown arms race.

Since the two countries exploded nuclear devices last year and declared themselves nuclear powers the international community has been trying to avert an arms race.

After Wednesday's test both countries tried to allay fears of

an arms race, but so far there has been no explanation from Pakistan why the second test.

A second more advanced Shaheen missile with a range of 2,300 kilometres (1,430 miles) is apparently ready and waiting to be tested. There has been no announcement of when or whether that ballistic missile would be tested.

Pakistan says it doesn't want to embark on an arms race, but won't be left behind if India begins developing nuclear arms.

The two countries have fought three wars in the past 51 years and their new nuclear status has caused many world leaders to express a fear that another confrontation between Pakistan and India could escalate into a nuclear war.

In comments published today in the English-language newspaper, The News, Qadir Khan, the architect of Pakistan's nuclear programme, dismissed allegations that Pakistan's missile technology has been purchased from North Korea.

Pakistan also is accused of buying M-11 ballistic missiles, capable of carrying nuclear warheads, from China, a charge both countries deny.

"They (western countries) have always been underestimating and underrating our capability," Khan was quoted as saying. "All the time whatever we do there is always a blame that we got things from here and there."

Following the test of the Shaheen surface-to-surface missile, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif congratulated Pakistan's scientists.

Land dispute delays power project

By Sharier Khan

Implementation of the biggest private sector power project in the country — the 450 MW Meghnaghat power plant — remains nearly one and a half years behind schedule due to lack of drive from the government despite experts' warning about serious power crisis in the coming years.

Sources concerned said the project is now facing uncertainty as land development for it — which has already missed deadline — is now being disputed. One of the bidders of the land development project has filed a writ petition with the High Court alleging that the PDB did not treat all the bidders equally. The court has issued an injunction on the project.

Besides, PDB could not make any satisfactory progress in signing final contracts with US company AES for the power project.

PDB had initiated a power purchase agreement (PPA) for the proposed plant on March 16 and said that final agreement would be signed within a week or two. But no progress has been made so far.

Under the agreement, average power tariff is only 2.79 cents which is half the power tariff of the private sector barge-mounted plants.

The project was originally scheduled to start generating power on commercial basis from early 2001. But it would not be completed before 2003, the sources said.

In a meeting at the Energy Ministry last week, the Prime Minister blasted the officials concerned for going slow on various power projects including the Meghnaghat project. She instructed the ministry, PDB and the Power Cell to expedite implementation of the projects.

Tender bids for Meghnaghat project were received by BPPB in July 1997. After a delay of over one year and a half, PDB initiated the PPA last month but, no progress has been made as regards signing of the PPA or finalisation of other accords — Implementation Agreement (IA), Gas Supply Agreement (GSA) and Land Lease Agreement (LLA).

Sources said, till now not a single meeting has taken place involving AES and PDB and Titus on the GSA.

"Till all the agreements are signed, the contract is not effective and the project work does

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Army at WASA pump houses

Army has been deployed at water supply stations in capital Dhaka and the port city of Chittagong following the instructions of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, reports UNB.

The authorities said the Prime Minister gave the instructions Wednesday night to deploy army to assist the administration to ease out persistent crisis in the supply of water in the two city areas.

The PM's order came as the city dwellers faced acute crisis of power and water since Friday last as on the previous night lightning struck the power transmission line that links Siddhirganj and Ulan grid station.

A press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) yesterday said groups of army personnel have been sent to various pump houses in the capital and the port city.

Apart from providing security to these installations, army officers and troops will provide other necessary assistance as and when required.

"Additional troops are kept ready to meet further requirements," said the release.

Bangladesh Army has also begun distributing drinking water to the members of the public in different parts of the capital by using their water bousers and trailers.



Army personnel deployed to protect different WASA pumps in the city. This picture was taken from Ramna WASA pump. —Star Photo: Enamul Haq

EC sets tall target

51% in four years, the rest in less than three months!

By Staff Correspondent

The government as well as the EC is determined to complete the work by the end of the present fiscal year," he said.

However, according to the EC secretary, the Commission has so far prepared only 3.10 crore identity cards. Of them, 1.60 crore have so far been distributed. Photographs of 3.65 crore out of 5 crore 99 lakh and two thousand eligible voters have been collected so far.

Project director Khan told newsmen that the government was yet to disburse Tk 39 crore of the Tk 181 crore project.

Besides, they are yet to get another Tk one crore that was supposed to come as foreign aid.

Of the money, the govern-

ment has already allocated Tk 50 lakh and we have asked for the rest of the amount," said the project director. "The amount was supposed to be spent on sensitisation activities to create awareness among voters about the ID cards."

However, when his attention was drawn to various errors, including miss-match of photographs, in a large number of the cards already distributed, the EC secretary said, "Some errors have been found in some of the previously issued ID cards."

The secretary requested those having faulty ID cards to consult with the deputy commissioners or the election officers.

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The Election Commission secretariat yesterday claimed that it would complete distribution of identity cards among all the voters of the country by June 30 this year, although it has so far prepared only 51 per cent of the IDs since 1995.

"Although it is a very difficult job, we are optimistic that we would be able to distribute ID cards to all the voters of the country by June 30 this year," said secretary of the EC Secretariat Abdullah Haroon Pasha at a press conference held yesterday morning.

Director of the voters ID card project and additional secretary Helal Uddin Khan echoed Pasha's sentiments.