

Pak parties, legal bodies reject Musharraf's move

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani opposition parties, Islamic groups and legal bodies yesterday angrily rejected constitutional changes by military ruler General Pervez Musharraf that will help him wield overall power after October polls.

Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999, unveiled the amendments on Wednesday empowering him to dismiss an elected parliament, name heads of military services and chair a civilian-military National Security Council to oversee the government formed after the October 10 election.

Hamid Khan, president of Supreme Court Bar Association, the country's main lawyers' body, said the sweeping changes could unleash a new constitutional crisis.

"These changes make president and armed forces more powerful than the elected representatives of the people," he told Reuters.

A spokesman for the Pakistan People's Party of exiled former

prime minister Benazir Bhutto called the National Security Council "a device to re-write the civil-military equation on military terms, which no civil society can accept."

Hardline Islamic groups, traditional allies of the military dictators who have ruled Pakistan for more than half its 55-year history, denounced the move as "unconstitutional and undemocratic."

"He has darkened the future of democracy in Pakistan," said Liaquat Baluch, deputy head of Jamaat-e-Islami, the major hard-line Islamic group.

The attitude of Islamic hardliners towards Musharraf soured after he threw his weight behind the US-led war on terror that toppled the fundamentalist Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan late last year.

The religious parties, whose strength in the past has been more in noisy street protests than in popular votes, have recently been discussing the possibility of co-operating with the opposition for the election.

Baluch said there was a possibility of cooperation with both Bhutto's PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif, who was overthrown as prime minister by Musharraf's coup.

Musharraf extended his presidential term for five more years through a controversial referendum in April, which the opposition said was massively rigged.

On Wednesday, he said the elected parliament would have the right to undo his amendments with a two-thirds majority but warned that would bring it in conflict with him.

"Then I will decide whether I should quit or they should go," he said.

Zafar Ali Shah, vice president of Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, said on Wednesday he did not think the new assembly would validate the changes.

"There cannot be a bigger injustice to the constitution and the mandate of the people than this," he said.

Sharif, like Bhutto, currently lives in exile. Musharraf has

repeatedly warned both politicians they would be arrested on corruption charges if they attempted to return to Pakistan to contest the polls.

Khan said the parliament should scrap the changes as they would legitimise the army's role in government through the National Security Council.

"These changes give a constitutional role to the armed forces in the governance of the country and it is unfortunate," he said.

A National Security Council has existed since the 1999 coup, but the formulation of its role will give Musharraf sweeping powers to dictate the affairs of the government given its strong military representation.

He will head the 13-member body, which will include the prime minister, the leader of the opposition, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, the heads of the three wings of the forces, the speakers of the lower and upper houses of parliament and the chief ministers of the four provinces.



A flood-hit family in a small boat is on the way to buy medicine yesterday in Kamrangirchar on the outskirts of the capital.

Nepal air crash

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small tourist town of Jomsom to Pokhara, a destination popular with tourists for its large lake and as a starting point for treks in the Annapurna mountains.

The German tourists had arrived in Nepal on August 12 and were due to return home on Friday, said a spokesman for their tour company, Shankar Travels.

"They were on a trekking holiday and were on their way back to Pokhara and were then due to fly to Kathmandu and home," he said.

The government immediately ordered an investigation into the cause of the crash, the radio said.

Bad weather was thought to be responsible for the accident and Pokhara airport was closed to all other flights.

Heavy monsoon rains during the past month have caused floods across the country, while a landslide on Wednesday triggered by rains is believed to have killed up to 100 people.

"We heard that bad weather could have been the cause of the accident, but we have no way of verifying this yet," an official from the German embassy in Kathmandu said.

A spokesman for the British embassy said a member of the consular staff had gone to Pokhara by helicopter.

There are about 10 private airlines in Nepal that started up after the country opened up its aviation sector to the private sector about a decade ago.

Yesterday's crash was the second involving a Twin Otter in a month. On July 17 a plane belonging to the private Skyline Airlines crashed killing all four people on board.

That plane was flying from the far northwestern city of Jumla to Surkhet in the south.

In November last year a Twin Otter loaded with emergency food supplies crashed in remote western Nepal after it was struck by a vulture. The captain of the Yetti Airlines plane survived.

The DeHavilland Twin Otter is a highly manoeuvrable aircraft which can be flown slowly (80-160 knots per hour) and in tight circles.

It is sold around the world in jungles, deserts, mountains, the Arctic, and anywhere where rugged reliability and short-take-off-and-landing capability are required.

Tourism has been hard hit in Nepal since a June 2001 massacre of the royal family and a subsequent surge in the Maoist insurgency.

More than 4,300 people have died in Nepal since the Maoists launched their "people's war" in 1996 to topple the constitutional monarchy.

BTTB land

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Power, water and gas are being illegally supplied to the illegal tenants, for which the BTTB pays. Lack of sanitation in the area has put the public health at risk. Unchecked encroachment and trespassing have become a threat to this telecom nerve centre. Mugging and extortion are a regular phenomenon.

Ninety acres out of the 170 acres of BTTB estate in Banani has so far been gobbled up.

According to Rajuk, the official value of the illegally occupied 90 acres is Tk 378 crore. But the amount would quadruple if the property were traded on the open market.

The BTTB hierarchy decided on August 8 to evict the illegal occupants from Banani on August 18. It also decided to compile the records of land being allocated to the employees.

But the move was halted after the death of four persons in a riot over eviction of the illegal occupants from the BTTB land at Moghbazar on August 15.

Hearing the death news, the BTTB unionists organised a 'victory procession' at the Banani satellite and microwave complex.

M Aminul Haque, the telecom minister, told The Daily Star that the unauthorised occupants would be evicted soon. He, however, did not specify any schedule.

TIB: Black money

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14 hours were spent out of 258 hours in the three sessions for lawmaking purposes while more than 16 hours spent for unscheduled discussions.

In the first session, five bills were passed while 12 bills were passed in the second session and seven in the third session, according to the TIB stocktaking on the legislative business.

Prof Mozaffer said in the first session, two hours were spent for passing five bills, taking on an average only 24 minutes for the passage of a bill. A little over seven hours were taken in the second session to pass 12 bills -- 38 minutes on an average per bill. In the third session 37.6 minutes were taken to pass seven bills.

"Quorum crisis was a regular phenomenon," said the TIB report, adding that the House sat everyday roughly 34 minutes behind the schedule. One day, the sitting began one hour and five minutes behind the schedule. "No sitting of the third session could begin on schedule."

About the first two sessions, which were not attended by the major opposition party Awami League, the report said the prime minister attended the sitting on time for a day only, out of 55 sitting days.

In the third session, the opposition walked out six times on different issues -- four times in protest

against gagging their voice. Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, chairman of the TIB, said his organisation had been advocating for appointment of an ombudsman for monitoring the parliament's activities.

He said most of the time was being spent for attacking opponents, which he termed "unfortunate".

He suggested appointment of an opposition member as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and stressed the need for formation of parliamentary standing committees as soon as possible.

Bangladesh keen to link Ctg port with Karachi, Colombo route

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday expressed interest in joining proposed Karachi-Colombo River Cruise line by linking Chittagong port to promote tourism and improve mutual cooperation among the people of SAARC countries.

Slate Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin said this during the meeting with his Sri Lankan counterpart Gamini Lokuge at the secretariat.

Putrid grain

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central supply depot (CSD) refused to receive a consignment of 300MT non-boiled rice sent from Gaibandha because of its low quality.

According to our Gaibandha Correspondent, Gaibandha DCF Abu Bakker said a three-member committee was formed to verify the quality of foodgrains in warehouses.

Following distribution of inedible rice among 100 families under the Bishnupur Asrayan project in Nabinagar Upazila, Brahmanbaria, the UNO of Nabinagar told UNB that action would be taken against those responsible.

Meanwhile, officials sealed some sacks of rice in a Kurigram granary upon detection of pebbles.

Pebble-mixed rice was detected during distribution of rice among flood victims under the TR programme, the UNO of Nagesh-wari, Kurigram, told The Daily Star.

The relief ministry has launched the GR and TR programmes with 25,000MT of foodgrains for the flood-affected people.

The ministry plans to go for a VGF programme with more foodgrains once the floodwater recedes.

Secretarial probe

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to submit its report by August 25. Yesterday, the committee also interviewed food directorate's additional director general Entajul Haque who has already been named by a food ministry probe committee as one involved in the wheat purchase irregularities.

The food ministry probe committee report, which was submitted to the food secretary on August 18, and to the prime minister and food minister on August 20 is yet to be made public.

Meanwhile, a ruling party lawmaker whose name was also mentioned in food ministry's probe report has reportedly visited the Prime Minister's Office yesterday and met a political secretary to the prime minister.

Indo-Pak talks

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porous border and Indian security forces lined up on the borders should play a part in stopping militants crossing over.

Talks between the nuclear rivals have been stalled since last year, with tensions spiralling after an Islamic militant attack on India's parliament complex last December by gunmen New Delhi claims were sponsored by Islamabad - a claim it rejects.

That attack resulted in hundreds of thousands of troops being deployed on the border, triggering international fears of a nuclear conflict.

After the meeting concluded Sinha said the tensions between India and Pakistan were not raised during the two-day meeting.

"It is our endeavour not to let bilateral issues cloud SAARC. No contentious issues were raised in the meeting."

But there was a spat between the two countries over the date of the next SAARC leader's summit due to be held in Islamabad next year, with Pakistani officials alleging India would not fix a date.

But Sinha said India would be attending summit, which he said would be on a date to be fixed between January 5 to 20 next year, despite what he called was some "confusion, perhaps deliberately created".

"This was misinterpreted... that India is not interested in attending the summit, which is not true.

Hasina protests

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government arrested him Wednesday night without any warrant.

"After assuming power, the BNP-Jamaat alliance started perpetrating torture and harassment on thousands of leaders and workers of opposition parties, including Awami League, implicating them in false cases," Hasina said in a press statement.

The former PM asked for stoppage of torture, harassment and arrest of the opposition leaders and activists and demanded unconditional release of those detained including Majumdar.

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

De-escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan and South Asian security will be on top of the agenda in talks between US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, who arrives here on a day's visit today, and Indian leaders and officials.

Armitage, who flies to Pakistan tomorrow, will hold talks with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes, National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra, Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal and other senior officials.

Armitage, according to diplomatic sources here, is expected to sound out India on the possibility of de-escalatory steps it could take to help reduce tensions with Pakistan.

But India, said the sources, is going to convey to the American official that it is not possible to go for either fresh set of de-escalatory measures or resumption of dialogue with Pakistan because President Pervez Musharraf is yet to take credible steps to end cross-border terrorism.

India is concerned that there has in fact been a spurt in cross-border infiltration since the end of June and there has not been even a temporary, not to speak of permanent, halt

to that, the sources pointed out.

What has caused more worry in New Delhi is that Musharraf, in a recent interview to a transnational news agency, said his security forces would not be able to prevent some terrorists from infiltrating into Jammu and Kashmir in the run up to assembly elections in the Indian state in September-October.

India will be conveying to Armitage that it was US Secretary of State Colin Powell who just last month had said that no attempt should be made to sabotage elections in Jammu and Kashmir and encouraged those who play by rules to take part in the democratic exercise.

India will be looking to Armitage to prod Musharraf to fulfil his promise to permanently end cross-border terrorism because it was the American Deputy Secretary of State to whom the Pakistan President had made the promise during his previous to the sub-continent in June, said the sources.

Indian leaders are going to use today's talks with Armitage to make it clear that suspicion about Musharraf's credibility has been deep in India.

There has been a sense of disquiet in New Delhi that US and British diplomatic initiative have so far failed to nudge Musharraf to halt

Clamour for hospital beds on

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sion.

Housewife Farsha Khatun died at a private clinic in the city where she was brought from Sirajganj General Hospital.

Health Secretary M Fazlur Rahman and Director General in-charge of Health Directorate Prof Mizanur Rahman yesterday visited the newly constructed national centre for urology and kidney diseases in the city and suggested opening of a dengue unit there if required. They asked the authorities to keep beds ready.

The ministry also tried to arrange beds for dengue patients in other hospitals like the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) in Mahakhali. But the idea was dropped as the authorities at the IDH feared that more people in the hospital might get infected.

Efforts to arrange beds in other hospitals is still on, ministry officials said.

At Shaheed Suhrawardi Hospital, all the 76 beds at the

'dengue ward' have been occupied by patients.

Health Minister Khandoker Mosharaf Hossain visited the hospital yesterday afternoon but at 4 pm no doctor was seen at the newly created 'dengue ward'. Only an intern doctor -- Atiqur Rahman -- was found on duty.

A young man was seen bleeding but there was no doctor. Only three nurses were on duty at the ward while more than 10 are supposed to be there.

Most of the patients at DMCH have to rush to private diagnostic centres for blood tests for dengue infection and for other tests including that for simple platelet count.

Meanwhile, the sophisticated blood separating device -- Cope Spectre -- at the DMCH has not come to much use in the face of platelet crisis now going on.

In last ten days, it provided service to only four patients. It is not only slow but also very costly and it needs careful operation, doctors operating the machine said.

"What is needed now is a cell separator, not a Cobe machine, which is too slow and does not really serve the purpose of treating a dengue patient. Besides, we are not well trained to run the device," said a doctor seeking anonymity.

A total of 30 units of platelet were supplied from the Red Crescent Blood centre yesterday. The rush for platelets was lesser yesterday than on previous days.

"People are not clamouring for platelets as they did a week ago," said one technologist at the centre.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has not yet done fogging in many of the areas having breeding grounds for Aedes mosquito, residents alleged.

DCC fogging programme remained extremely slow and confined to only some limited areas, they alleged.

DCC authorities are still sitting on the file for import of 8000 litres of larvaecide on an emergency basis, it was learnt.

Decapitated body

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building at Muradpur High School Road in Shyamपुर area.

Shyamপুর police said rice trader Monju Hossain Shyamol, alias Shimul, 19, was called out of his rice shop at Jurain Bazaar by his friend Sidka Monir on Wednesday evening.

Construction workers saw a body on the roof at about 8:30am yesterday. Some local people informed Shimul's family who identified the body. Police recovered the body and sent it to Mitford Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Police arrested the killer -- Sidka -- and his father Sukur Mahmud. Police said Sidka confessed killing Shimul.

Police said Shimul's elder brother Zakir Hossain, a Jobo Dal activist, was also killed by Sidka Monir in November 1999. Shimul was killed as he was a witness in the case filed in connection with his

elder brother's killing. Restaurant owner Shahabuddin, 35, was beaten to death by his employees at the restaurant at Uttar Jatrabari in Demra area on Wednesday night.

Demra police said the restaurant owner allegedly made irregular payments to his staff.

Shahabuddin was disbursing wages after work on Wednesday night. He ran short of Tk 160.

Some of his employees got angry at non-disbursement wages and an altercation ensued. At one stage they started beating him. Shahabuddin collapsed on the floor.

People nearby rushed in and took him to DMCH where doctors declared him dead.

A case has been filed with Demra police station. Police arrested two of the employees Moklesur Rahman and Mohammad Dulal -- in connection with the murder.

New twist in M-16 tale

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the back from the government.

According to the new plan, the police officer and his cohorts tried to force Razzak and Shufal to give confessional statements but failed. Then they persuaded the two others -- Lavlu and Russell -- into giving confessional statements, sources said.

Police later claimed Lavlu and Russell had confessed that Obayedul Kader, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Kamal Ahmed Majumdar, Asim Kumar Ukil and Shafi Ahmed had ordered them to bring the M-16.

Interestingly, the investigating officer was in Chittagong when Lavlu and Russell made confessional statements before the court.

Moreover, when Razzak and Shufal refused to make any confessional statement, the police did not make any plea to the court for their remand, as is customary in such cases.

Over the last few days, according to reliable sources, the said police officer have been putting pressure on his subordinates, who are probing the case, to press charges against the five AL leaders.

However, the police officials refused to do so fearing they might become 'victim of circumstances', the sources said.

Police officials in charge of the case reasoned that all the accused AL leaders had taken anticipatory bail from the High Court, so it would be impossible to arrest them in the

M-16 case. Failing to compel his subordinates, the police officer arrested Majumder Wednesday night under section 54 of the CrPC.

Now, police are in a dilemma as to how to proceed with the case and whether to serve the purpose of one police officer or accuse him of framing political leaders in a false case, sources said.

Meantime, the police officer has managed to put his transfer order on hold, the police department sources said.

Benazir

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He says the elected parliament would have the right to undo his amendments with a two-thirds majority, but has warned it would bring it into conflict with him.

"It's a bit shocking that the general has given himself dictatorial powers. He's calling dictatorship democracy," Benazir said.

Benazir, whose two terms in office ended when she was sacked by the president on charges of corruption, said the power of successive Pakistani presidents had undermined its democracy.

"The president had too many powers. He wanted to be both president and prime minister and unless there's a balance, an ambitious president will want to exercise powers that are beyond his own realm," she said.

AFP, Washington

The world will deteriorate into a grim home for nine billion people, many of them impoverished, in 50 years unless rich countries act now, the World Bank said Wednesday.

World leaders must agree on the steps when they gather at the UN Earth Summit in Johannesburg, starting Monday, the Bank said in its annual World Development Report.

Asked about the prospects for the Johannesburg summit in light of US President George W. Bush's decision to give it a miss, World Bank spokeswoman Caroline Anstey told a news conference: "We are owned by 183 countries not by one."

Ian Johnson, vice president of the World Bank and head of its environmental network, expressed

some regret. "The United States are sending a strong delegation but it would have been nice to have every head of state," Johnson said.

The World Bank report estimated that the world population would grow to nine billion people by 2050, stabilising at the end of this century at 10 billion or less.

Two-thirds of the planet would live in cities, placing enormous demands on resources for energy, water, housing and education.

"The 140-trillion-dollar world of five decades' time simply cannot be sustained on current production and consumption patterns," World Bank chief economist Nicholas Stern said.

"A major transformation -- beginning in the rich countries -- will be needed to ensure that poor people

have an opportunity to participate and that the environment is not damaged in a way that undermines their opportunities for the future."

The challenges were daunting. The average income in the richest 20 countries was already 37 times that of the poorest 20 nations.

In the world, 1.3 million people lived on fragile lands such as arid zones, wetlands and forests that could not sustain them. The gap between rich and poor countries had doubled in 40 years.

Stern pressed rich countries to act first, chiding them for spending lots of money protecting their own farmers, and pricing the needy farm-exporting countries out of the world market.

Rich countries must abandon a system in which they spend a billion dollars a day on agricultural subsi-

dies, the report said.

The challenges of the world's population and social trends also offered opportunities, the report said. As population growth slowed, economic growth would lift people out of poverty with greater ease, but only if the environment survived intact, the Bank said.

Johnson said poor countries' economies would have to grow at 3.6 per cent per person to meet two-year-old internationally-agreed Millennium Development Goals, including halving poverty by 2015.

"It would be recklessness of us to successfully reach the Millennium Development Goals in 2015, only to be confronted by dysfunctional cities, dwindling water supplies, more inequality and conflict, and even less cropland to sustain us than we have now," he said.

Kamal Majumder held

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anarchy in the country. He was also making provocative statements at AL's public meetings.

Majumder is involved in moves to cause deterioration of law and order in the city and across the country. He is the leader of several armed groups. He created a rain of terror in his locality and none dares to say anything against him, the forwarding report said.

It suggested detaining him for the sake of the law and order in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

Defence lawyers Sahara Khatun, M Sajwar Hossain, Abdullah Abu and Abdur Rahman Hawlader submitted a petition seeking bail for Kamal Majumder and cancellation of the remand prayer.

They stated that detectives arrested the AL leader saying that he is accused in the M-16 rifle arms case. He showed them an order sheet of the High Court regarding his anticipatory bail. But detectives wanted to see certified copy of the order. As the lawmaker failed to show it, he was arrested. He is suffering from diabetes, they mentioned and prayed for his bail.

Court inspector Alfa Zaman Naqib opposed the bail petition and prayed for granting remand. After hearing both the sides, Magistrate

Shafiq Anwar rejected the bail petition and gave the remand order.

Soon after the remand order, the defence submitted two other petitions - one seeking stay of the remand order as they (defence) will file a criminal revision with the higher court against it and the other praying that the former lawmaker should not be interrogated by the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC).

After hearing, the court rejected the petition seeking stay of the remand order. The court also directed the investigation officer (IO) of the case to see that the accused is not interrogated by the JIC and to produce him before it (court) on expiry of remand. Besides, the IO was asked to take necessary steps for treatment of the accused if he is sick.

Meanwhile, DB officials kept tight lipped about the arrest of Kamal Majumder.