

Pak ruling party eyes ban on forced marriage

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's ruling party introduced a bill yesterday aimed at outlawing the forced marriage of women and practices preventing them from inheriting property.

President Pervez Musharraf has vowed to empower women as part of his vision of "enlightened moderation" for the predominantly Muslim country of 160 million people where women, particularly in poor, rural areas, face widespread discrimination and violence.

The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill introduced in parliament on Tuesday is expected to be referred to a committee that will finalize a draft to be debated and voted upon later in the year.

"The credit for this goes to President Musharraf who is endeavouring to give due status to women in society," the head of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, told the lower house National Assembly.

The bill seeks to end practices such as vari, a centuries-old tradition of marrying women off to settle disputes between families, and the practice of marrying women to the Koran, which deprives them of a share of family property, he said.

2 grenades

before a magistrate's court with a prayer for a 10-day remand after showing him arrested in a murder case. The court, however, granted only four days' remand, our Tangail correspondent reports.

Dulal Mian Patwary, Chandpur district BNP vice-president, Ali Ahmed Biswas, chairman of Raghbari union parishad (UP) of Magura who is also an accused 12 cases including three murder cases, Mahbub Ali Chowdhury, chairman of Char Ashtadar UP of Sherpur, Saiful Haq Khan Choudhury alias Faruk Choudhury, chairman of Mirpur municipality of Kushtia and also president of Mirpur municipality BNP, Gazi Giasul, general secretary Baufal upazila Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal, Nurul Alam Numan, former Moulvibazar Jatiyatabadi Chhata Dal (JCD) general secretary, and two UP members of Mymensingh Sadar Upazila.

A Sylhet court yesterday sent General Secretary of Sylhet Awami League (AL) Iftekhar Hossain Sharmin and two others arrested on Monday to jail with detention orders under Special Powers Act, our staff correspondent in Sylhet reports.

Police produced Sharmin before the Sylhet Sadar Magistrate's Court, which rejected his bail prayer.

Sylhet police claimed there had been allegations of land grabbing and harbouring of criminals against the AL leader. However, the court granted his division status in jail.

Our Moulvibazar correspondent reports: Joint forces arrested former JCD district general secretary Nurul Alam Numan and a member of district Juba Dal committee. The forces caught the two in the act of using force to drop a tender in the LGED office yesterday noon.

Police said the joint forces arrested Kushtia's Mirpur municipality chairman Faruk Choudhury when he was holding a secret meeting with his men around 1:30pm yesterday, our correspondent in Kushtia reports.

Separate courts in Sylhet and Sunamganj also sent arrested former Kuchai UP chairman Dara Miah and Chhatak municipality chairman to jail yesterday.

Emergency declared

who said he sidestepped a power-sharing agreement by naming a confidant, and angry youths took to the streets, throwing stones and burning tires.

"I satisfactorily fulfilled all points of the demands. In spite of this goodwill, badly intentioned people restarted the union movement to ridicule the authority of the State," Conte said in the broadcast.

Union leaders called for Conte's resignation and restarted a general strike Monday. Gangs of machete-wielding youths roamed the capital throughout the day, while gunfire was heard in some neighbourhoods.

At least 11 people died in Saturday's violence, according to medical officials and witnesses.

Sixteen more bodies of people killed in the fighting were brought to Conakry's main morgue Monday, said Hassan Bah, the director of the city's Ignace Deen hospital. It was not immediately clear when they had been killed.

Leaders of the political opposition put Saturday's deaths figure at more than 30 and Conakry's League of Human Rights said it had tallied 57 deaths in the interior of the country from reports by its local representatives.

According to Guinean law, a state of emergency prohibits all processions, demonstrations or gatherings and institutes a strict curfew. It also authorizes the military to put anyone participating in activities against the state under house arrest, gives officials wide latitude and gives the military authority to monitor phone calls and other communications.

The president of Guinea's national assembly called for union and community leaders to return to negotiations with the government, according to a statement read on Guinea's FM Liberty radio station.

The station switched to music broadcasts from news during the day after a raid by government

Yunus

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Ruling out the possibility of joining any of the existing political parties, the Nobel laureate said he will contest the next election as an independent candidate if the process to form his party is delayed.

"A political party is not a must to contest the election, I can compete as an independent candidate," he said.

On legal bars to political activities under the existing state of emergency, Yunus said he would go by the law. "I have all the respect for laws, and whatever I do, I must do that obeying the existing laws of the land."

"We want to have a good environment created through the election and do not want to see the country plunged in again," he said.

Human rights groups welcomed the reform but said the Islamic laws, introduced by a military dictator in 1979, should have been scrapped all together.

Some rights activists and opposition politicians have accused Musharraf of courting and indirectly promoting conservative religious parties when it has suited him politically, although he has more recently called on people to reject those parties.

Musharraf is also expected to try to push through reform of a blasphemy law that rights groups say is used to oppress religious minorities.

Musharraf, who is also army chief and a major US ally, is widely expected to seek a second-term in office in the run-up to a general election due late this year or early next year.

On absorbing leaders from other political parties, he said his party will take in those leaders who will be helpful for them in achieving their "basic target".

Asked what Prof Yunus in a part-time role will look like, he said, "I do not know."

Brig Sakhawat

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Chandpur district BNP Vice-President Dulal, arrested on Monday night, was produced before a court with a bail petition. The court rejected his bail prayer and sent him to jail, our Chandpur correspondent reports.

A Sylhet court yesterday sent General Secretary of Sylhet Awami League (AL) Iftekhar Hossain Sharmin and two others arrested on Monday to jail with detention orders under Special Powers Act, our staff correspondent in Sylhet reports.

The CEC and the election commissioner informed the chief adviser (CA) that they are preparing a set of proposals for reforms in the electoral system, which will take a few more days to be completed, according to sources.

Sources in the EC Secretariat said the commission will propose to make political parties' registration mandatory and to increase the ceiling on election expenditure in an effort to thwart the influence of black money polls.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday Sohul Hossain said about their visit to the CA's office, "It was just a courtesy call. We did not discuss any specific issue. The chief adviser assured us of all out support to holding a free and fair election."

The CEC on Monday told reporters that they will complete the task of preparing an action plan by next Sunday.

Sources in the EC Secretariat said the CEC might disclose the reform plan on Sunday.

Indian High Commissioner Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, and Pakistan High Commissioner Alamgir Bashir Khan Babar met the CEC separately yesterday and assured the EC of their cooperation in holding a free and fair election.

Former adviser to the caretaker government M Hafizuddin Khan said voter list is a continuous process and "We should prepare it every year, which will reduce the cost and help keep it accurate."

Dr Atiur Rahman of Unnayan Shamannay said the EC should have strong monitoring system for updating the voter list. There could

Mashud

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Bangladesh's 3-1 series victory against Zimbabwe. The selectors considered Rahim's batting ahead of Mashud.

Left-handed opener Tamim Iqbal, nephew of former Bangladesh captain Akram Khan and brother of out-of-favour national opener Nafis Iqbal, was the other young gun in the squad.

Among the squad, only Habibul Bashar, Mohammad Ashraful, Tapash Baisya, Mohammad Rafique and Mashrafee-bin Mortza have the experience of playing a World Cup.

Bangladesh, pitted against two former world champions in Group B, will take on India on March 17, Sri Lanka on March 21 and qualifiers Bermuda on March 25. The Tigers, expected to fly to the West Indies on February 19, will play lead-up games against New Zealand (March 6) and Scotland (March 8) in Barbados following a two-week preparation camp.

SQUAD
Habibul Bashar (captain), Shahriar Nafees, Tamim Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Sakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful, Mashrafee bin Mortza, Shahadat Hossain, Tapash Baisya, Syed Rasel, Rajin Saleh and Javed Omar.

Corrupt politicians

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grabbing continued. More steps for people's welfare will be taken in phases.

"All of us have to work with a zeal of patriotism. We have to identify our problems and find ways to resolve those ourselves, not on alien prescriptions, to turn the country into a sonar Bangla."

He added, "We were victorious in 1971. We have faced cyclones and tidal bores with courage and fortitude. We will be able to resolve the problems with our united efforts."

Later, General Moeen distributed house allotment letters of the rehabilitation project among 80 people affected by the demolition of slums in the town.

He also met army personnel deployed here. They apprised him of the situation prevailing in the district.

UNDP pledges

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accountable to the people and press is free despite state of emergency. "We're accountable in many ways," he told the UNDP representative.

He said the caretaker government is working to fulfill people's expectations as much as possible through identifying the high priority tasks on short-term basis and also taking long-term initiatives to be implemented by the next government.

Fakhrudin said the Election Commission (EC) has already been reconstituted, while reconstruction of the Anti-Corruption Commission is nearing completion.

He said Bangladesh is a vibrant economy which has many achievements and hoped that the country will be able to come out of the present situation and the economy will get a further boost.

The chief adviser gave the UNDP representative an overview of the caretaker government, saying they have two main objectives -- holding a credible election and keeping the economy moving.

Responding to the UNDP representative

about the timeframe of the next election, the chief adviser said the Election Commission will now decide the matter as they have to accomplish the tasks of setting up criteria for candidature, election campaign rules, and updating the voter list and other related matters.

He said the government has kept windows open to update people about reforms and steps being taken. "Similarly, people will be able to know the steps being taken by the Election Commission."

The UNDP representative apprised that they have submitted two projects -- computerisation of voters' database and the process of electoral reforms -- to the Election Commission. "If the Election Commission wants, we'll provide support," she said.

The chief adviser said Bangladesh's relations with other UN organisations are very good and they are involved in various sectors for economic development of the country.

India, Pakistan

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and long term... I'm greatly encouraged by what I think they are going to do," the Indian envoy told reporters after an hour-long meeting with the CEC and the election commissioner.

Asked if they have any suggestions for the reconstituted EC, he said they have no suggestions as such. "It is for them to decide how they want to proceed."

Pinak Chakravarty pointed out that there is a very powerful election commission in India that has done a lot of work and research on how things are done regarding elections. He also mentioned that they have voter ID, and also have electronic voting system.

"So it's up to the EC here to seek directly from our EC, if they wish to have any ideas, information or even just how we do things, for the experience that our EC can share with them," the Indian high commissioner said.

Later, Pakistani High Commissioner Alamgir Babar met the CEC Huda and Commissioner Sohul. The CEC briefed him on the preparations that are being made for the elections.

"I offered him on behalf of Pakistan assistance or help to support the process (electoral process)," Babar told reporters after half an hour's parley at noon.

Babar declined to make any comment on how they are defining the EC and its reconstitution as he observed the matter as a domestic one.

Polls show most Americans oppose Bush's troop boost plan.

Discontent with the Iraq war played a major part in the Democrats' takeover of Congress in November elections.

House Republican leaders wanted a vote on a substitute proposal that would prevent a cutoff of funds for US troops. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, a Maryland Democrat, refused, saying he wanted to avoid the kind of fight that engulfed the Senate last week over whether to debate troop funding along with the troop increase.

US House resolution

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Amid Senate procedural wrangling, the issue was shelved.

The House does not have the same rules allowing a minority to stall debate, and Republicans seeking a vote on war funding may have to wait until Democrats allow such a measure. Hoyer says the Republicans will get that chance in 30 to 45 days.

Meanwhile, a suicide truck bomber blew up near a Baghdad college yesterday, killing 18 people and wounding 40, police said.

Police said the small truck exploded in a parking lot between the College of Economic Sciences, a private university in western Baghdad's residential Iskan district, and a large foodstuff warehouse belonging to the Trade Ministry.

The blast destroyed one house and severely damaged others, police said.

The explosion followed multiple bombings at two Baghdad markets on Monday that killed at least 80 people and wounded thousands.

US-backed Iraqi forces have launched a crackdown in the city to quell sectarian bloodletting between majority Shias and minority Sunnis. The move is seen as a last chance to avert all-out civil war, but it has made little impact so far on the unrelenting violence that has killed tens of thousands.

Major shake-up

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DMP while SP Rajshahi Mahbub Alam was made DC of SMP.

KMP DC Sakhawat Hossain was made SP of Netrakona, CID SS Biswas Afzal Hossain was made Munshiganj SP, Rajbari SP Firoz Ali Mujahid Khan was made AIG (telecom), SB SS Abdullahe Bakri was made Sylhet SP while commander of APBn Uttara Moshqueh Rahman was made SP of Noakhali.

CMP DC Towfig Mahbub Chowdhury was made SP of Barisal, RMP DC Shafiqul Islam was made Joypurhat SP, SMP DC Abdul Qader was made SP of Bandarban, AIG PHQ Mahfuzul Islam was made Narail SP, commander of Dhaka APBn Monjurul Kabir was made Kurigram SP and Sylhet SP Abdur Rahim was made SP of Highway Police (East).

Arrest warrant

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Witnesses, the injured and police sources said a gang of armed robbers busted open main gates of Sekandar Ali Khan and Delwar Hossain Khan's houses located in the same village at around 2:00am early Tuesday morning and attacked the family members.

Hearing the commotion, a police patrol team led by Abdur Razzak, officer in charge of Nalchity Police Station, and villagers came forward to arrest the criminals.

The robbers started to flee the scene with their loot blasting bombs and opening fire on the police and the crowd. Police also returned fire and chased the robbers with the villagers on their side.

Police and the villagers later found one of the robbers -- Hanif alias Dul -- with critical bullet injuries. A pipe gun and three bullets were found from the spot. Dul died on the way to hospital.

Another robber Abdul Kader's body was recovered along with a few looted items.

Bodies of the robbers were sent to the Lalokhati morgue for autopsies.

2 robbers killed

FROM PAGE 16

Established to refine imported raw sugar and sell it in the market. According to the law, the particular company has to take a BSTI licence to maintain the standard of edible products.

Earlier, Partex Sugar Ltd informed BSTI on January 14 this year that their boiler was out of order and they were not in production, the BSTI sources said.

"So now it is clear that they had bad intentions to produce sugar without maintaining the standard," said the BSTI official.

The mobile court initially detained five workers and fined Tk 7,500 for not obtaining the BSTI licence. The court released the workers in the evening after the company paid the fine. The court seized all products from the factory.

The court issued arrest warrants against MA Hashem, the chairman of the Partex Group, managing director Showkat Aziz Russell, directors Sultan Hashem, Aziz Al-Kaiser and Aziz Al-Mahmood as they were not present at the scene.