

Pakistan rules out early elections

Govt takes U-turn in judge case

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's government yesterday ruled out holding early elections amid growing speculation that a crisis over President Pervez Musharraf's ouster of the chief justice could force snap polls.

Information Minister Mohammad Ali Durran said the country's federal and provincial assemblies would see out their full five-year term, which is due to end in November, and that elections would then be held.

"The elections will be held on schedule and there is no possibility of any snap polls," Durran told AFP. "The assemblies will complete their tenure."

The minister's statement indicates that military ruler Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999, is set to continue with his original plan to seek reelection as president-in-uniform by the current

assemblies.

Officials have said this is likely to happen in September.

Such an election would be a way for Musharraf to get around a constitutional provision that says he should quit as chief of the powerful army by the end of 2007.

But Musharraf has faced growing protests against his rule since suspending Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in March.

Political clashes in the southern city of Karachi in May left more than 40 people dead.

Speculation mounted among parliamentarians in recent days that the embattled president would announce snap elections, possibly in mid-July, so he could be reelected by the new assemblies and preempt future political turmoil.

Opposition parties including the Pakistan People's Party of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto say

this would be unfair, especially as they allege that tens of millions of voters are missing from electoral rolls.

In the latest protests against Musharraf, around 1,200 lawyers and opposition party activists burned effigies of the president in the eastern city of Lahore on Thursday, while 800 people rallied in northwestern Peshawar.

Meanwhile, a lawyer for Pakistan's government said yesterday it now had no objections if the Supreme Court deals with misconduct charges leveled by President Pervez Musharraf against the country's top judge.

The government previously wanted the allegations against Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry -- who was suspended by military ruler Musharraf in March -- to be dealt with by a special panel of five judges.



Indonesian people wade through flooded street yesterday at Pemancingan village in Klungkung on the island of Bali. Hundreds of houses were inundated by floodwaters, which reached a height of up to two metres in parts of the region.

PHOTO: AFP

Asians must understand each other's concern

Says Manmohan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked Asian countries to look at each other through "borrowed eyes" for greater understanding and cooperation among themselves.

"We Asians often look at each other through borrowed eyes, through tinted glasses and distorted mirrors. This must change," he said while releasing a book "The New Asia Power Dynamic" by former Indian Foreign Secretary M K Rasgotra here on Wednesday night.

Asian countries must learn to have an informed understanding of each other's concerns, Singh said adding the people in India must devote more time and resources in studying the strongest economies of Asia, China, Japan and South Korea, Singh said.

The prime minister said India's "Look East" policy, introduced in 1991, has contributed to a comprehensive re-engagement with South East and East Asia.

The rapid economic growth of China and India created new opportunities for expansion of trade and investment to their mutual advantages, he said and rejected suggestions that India was ganging up against China.

Singh said he had told the Chinese leadership that there was no question of ganging up against China as healthy ties between the two Asian giants was in the interest of both.

He said India and China were engaged in talks to solve the border problem and he did not have any instant solution to it.

Singh said India has revitalised Saarc as shown by the agenda and success of the Delhi summit in March this year. However, there is a need to realise the full potential of the regional grouping and civil societies must play its role in building mutual understanding, he added.

"We are generally more aware of what happens far away in distant shores than in the countries of our region," the Indian prime minister said.

Indo-US nuke deal to be implemented this year

Says Rice

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Wednesday that a "historic" nuclear energy pact with India could be clinched this year with enough commitment from both sides.

"Had this been easy, it would have been done a long time ago," Rice told the US-India Business Council, while trumpeting the deal's benefits both to fast-growing India's energy needs and to US nuclear companies.

Megrahi, now 55, was convicted by a trio of Scottish judges sitting in a special court in the Netherlands of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 on December 21, 1988. He was jailed for a total of 27 years.

Megrahi, who applied for the SCRC review three years ago, has always proclaimed his innocence.

The explosion on the New York-bound flight killed all 259 people on board and 11 people on the ground in the southern Scottish town of Lockerbie in what was Britain's worst terrorist atrocity.

A previous appeal by the former Libyan intelligence officer, who is being held in a jail near Glasgow, western Scotland, was thrown out in 2002.

Myanmar releases dozens of dissidents

AP, Yangon

Myanmar's military regime has

released

dozens

of

dissidents

AP

Yangon

Myanmar's military regime has

released

dozens

of

activists

detained

last

month

after

marching

in

processions

to

pray

for

the

release

of

pro

democracy

leader

Aung

Suu

Kyi

the

opposition

confirmed

Thursday.

At least 47 of the 52 who were arrested in separate incidents in May were freed Wednesday night, Myint Thein, a spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, said in a telephone interview.

"Authorities released the prayer vigil campaigners last night, but we are concerned about Phy Phyu Thin who has not yet been released," Myint Thein said.

Phyu Phyu Thin, an AIDS activist from Suu Kyi's NLD party, was taken from her home on May 21 for questioning by police. She recently went on a hunger strike and was reportedly not well.

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