

E Timor 'hero' set to form coalition government

AFP, Dili

East Timor appeared set Friday for a coalition government led by the independence leader Xanana Gusmao after the troubled nation's parliamentary election last week.

Gusmao's party has formed an alliance with smaller groups to achieve the majority needed to rule the impoverished half-island nation, which gained independence from Indonesia in 2002.

The alliance, if approved, would open a new chapter in the young nation's turbulent history and leave the former ruling party, Fretilin, in opposition, even though it won the largest share of the vote in the poll.

Gusmao's National Congress of East Timor's Reconstruction (CNRT) will ally with the Association of Timorese Democrats-Social Democrat Party and the Democrat Party, the groups said.

Taken together they won 51 percent of votes. The CNRT, formed earlier this year, won 24 percent of the vote.

"We hope this alliance is able to guarantee a strong and lasting majority," the parties said in a statement read to a press briefing.

"This coalition, which will constitute a majority in parliament, has accepted the call for governance," they said. "The details of the agreement will be decided later and presented to you."

But Fretilin said it had not agreed to sit in opposition, signalling a possible legal battle ahead.

The party, which has dominated East Timor's political landscape since its election in 2001, won 29 percent of the votes cast in the poll contested by 14 parties.

But that was well short of the absolute majority required to form a government in the 65-seat parliament.

"We don't rule out the possibility of forming our own government or the possibility of forming a government with other parties," a senior Fretilin advisor, Harold Moucho, told AFP.

"There is still time for negotiations... You need to get all the parties together. One cannot put aside the party which won the majority of votes," he said.

East Timor's Court of Appeal must confirm the election results

and then the coalition must seek approval from President Jose Ramos-Horta to form a government.

Sophia Cason from the thinktank International Crisis Group told AFP the constitution was ambiguous on what should happen next and she believed the president would get legal advice.

"I think President Ramos-Horta will ask Fretilin to form a government and CNRT will obviously object to that. He will then give Fretilin a week and then will ask CNRT to form a government," she said.

She warned that no matter who takes power, they may have difficulty passing a budget if MPs cross the floor -- which could force an early next election.

The new government will face a formidable job, as the tiny nation has suffered massive economic and social dislocation.

Atul Khare, the head of the UN mission in East Timor, said in a statement that the interpretation of the constitution was up to the East Timorese.

It was important "to move forward in a way that was legally correct and contributed to the continuing political stabilisation" of the nation, he added.

The parliamentary election followed ongoing violence and political tension since bloodshed on the streets of the capital, Dili, in April and May last year.

That unrest left at least 37 dead and forced some 150,000 people into camps, with most of those displaced still stuck in them.

International peacekeepers and 1,700 UN police were deployed to restore calm. They remain on high alert for post-poll parades and protests.

Fretilin's shrunken showing in the poll was seen as punishment for its failure to prevent last year's unrest or lift the country out of grinding poverty.

Although rich in offshore oil and gas deposits, unemployment is running at close to 50 percent.

East Timor gained independence in 2002 after a bloody separation from occupying Indonesia three years earlier. It had also been ruled by Portugal for more than four centuries.

Jalil's petition

FROM PAGE 1

pressure, added the rights activist. "If the politicians continue caving in to pressure, then people will lose faith in them and as a result, democracy will be at stake," she observed.

AL Presidium Member Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser yesterday too questioned the authenticity of the letter. He said he wonders how anyone can be sure that Jalil himself has written it.

In the four-paged computer composed letter, Jalil pleaded the military-backed caretaker government to free him on humanitarian grounds and said he was ready to leave politics.

He also blasted AL President Sheikh Hasina for what he said was her dictatorial leadership.

BNP Standing Committee Member Let Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman said he thinks Jalil's decision is a good sign for the country's politics.

He said the AL leader's decision to leave politics voluntarily might help many other politicians realize that it was their failure not to contribute to politics in a positive way and that they were involved in misdeeds.

"Mr. Jalil has realised and admitted his failures, and I think it's a good sign," Rahman, a former army chief told The Daily Star.

"At least one example of quitting politics willingly has been established in the country's current political state. This will help bring back the congenial atmosphere and carry forward the current reform process initiative," said the pro-reform BNP stalwart.

Replying to a query, he said as Jalil's wife, the nearest and dearest one, has distributed copies of the letter there is no room for thinking otherwise.

Transparency International Bangladesh Chairman Prof

100 mosques

FROM PAGE 16

as part of a broader operation that included at least two additional mosques, one in Yavneh and the other in the nearby Mediterranean city of Ashdod, Haaretz said.

Of the 100 mosques in Palestinian villages incorporated into Israel under the armistice agreements, fewer than 40 are still standing, the newspaper quoted a Tel Aviv University study as showing.

Various holy sites were levelled despite protests from the then head of the Israeli antiquities department, Shmuel Yeivin, who believed that ancient sites and holy places needed to be preserved whoever they were sacred to.

BNP reformists

FROM PAGE 1

such committee. He said while preparing the reform proposals they discussed whether a cleansing drive shall be launched but did not discuss its ways.

The pro-reform leaders said they do not want to initiate any step that may trigger further controversy in the party. The government knows very well about the corrupt leaders and its intelligence agencies have adequate information; the government will help the pro-reform leaders to cleanse the BNP, they said.

A number of these leaders meanwhile said the possibility of forming such a committee in future is also slim. They however said the leaders involved in corruption will get immunity if the reform agenda is implemented without launching the cleansing drive.

BNP Standing Committee Member and former lawmaker Lt Gen (ret'd) MahbuburRahman told The Daily Star that the inquiry committee should be formed according to the party secretary general's announcement.

"Of course, we want to launch a cleansing drive to oust the corrupt and dishonest leaders from the party," he said. However, asked if there is any progress regarding formation of the body, he replied in the negative.

Since June 25 the pro-reform leaders led by Bhuiyan have been putting all the energy to hold national council soon to implement the reform proposals including one to dislodge Khaleda Zia from the post of chairperson.

Contacted by The Daily Star, former BNP lawmaker Sardar Sakhawat Hossain Bakul, who is facing an extortion case, said they are working to hold the national council but he refused to make any comment on the formation of the probe body.

Mannan

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, BNP Joint Secretary General Ashraf Hossain, a close aide to Bhuiyan, yesterday said, "We have already informed her of the reforms issue and she could have asked us for more information."

He was talking to the reporters after meeting Mannan Bhuiyan at his residence.

Asked about Khaleda's call for the leaders and workers to remain united against conspiracy, Ashraf said, "You'd better ask her about it as we don't know anything about conspiracy."

He said, "We had to take the initiative to hold the council as she [Khaleda] has all along been indifferent to the matter."

Ashraf claimed that they are receiving a huge positive response from the rank and file. "Many of them came to us with a number of excellent proposals on how to make the party democratic," he observed.

He said like their party chief, they too want the ban on indoor politics to go but the decision rests with the government.

Khaleda on Thursday also demanded that the caretaker government lift the ban to create an atmosphere congenial to holding a council and allow free discussions and decision-making regarding the reforms.

According to the reform proposals unveiled by Bhuiyan and allies, the absolute powers of the chairperson must be curbed for the BNP to graduate to a democratic organisation. And the party constitution would have to be amended to make that happen.

The chairperson will be elected for three years instead of the existing two years. No one will be allowed to hold the apex post for more than two terms. The proposed provision will be applicable also to those who already held the post for two terms or more than six years.

Biman staff

FROM PAGE 1

and profitable commercial venture. Those who had left under the VRS, would get Tk 10 to 40 lakh as per the rules, Biman sources said.

"After receiving consent letters from the retired staffs, we will get the idea about how much money we can collect from them for the new airline," Captain Nasimul Haque said.

"We would also go for bank loans," Sulaiman said.

Elaborating on their plan, Captain Nasim said that they would collect new generation aircraft through lease and will operate on those routes, which are profitable but kept suspended by Biman.

About the administration of their planned airline, he said that there would be no groupings and the board of directors would be the highest authority to make any decision.

"It is yet to be fixed," Captain Nasim said about the name of their planned airline. "Biman Employees Airlines," "Balaka," and "Biman" are some of the proposed names, he added.

Sulaiman said that primarily they have planned to operate their flights on Dhaka-Dubai-London and Dhaka-Dubai-New York routes.

"Instead of DC-10 aircraft, we will use Boeing-777," he added.

"Experience is our capital, we want to prove that it is possible to make profit if an airline is run in a professional manner," he further said.

Muyeed Chowdhury could not be contacted for his comments as he is abroad.

Britain recalls

FROM PAGE 16

"I want us to be able to work more closely with foreign authorities to deal with this security menace," he added.

Londoners have spent a jittery week since the latest attacks, and nerves will no doubt be tested on Saturday, the second anniversary of the July 7, 2005 suicide bombings on London's transport network that killed 52.

But progress in the investigation has been swift, with arrests both in Britain and Australia.

In Sydney on Friday, authorities said that officers had raided hospitals in the Western Australian cities of Perth and Kalgoorlie and briefly quizzed four Indian doctors who had previously worked in the British health system.

Federal Police commissioner Mick Keelty said a fifth doctor, reportedly an Indian working in Sydney, was questioned in New South Wales as the Australian investigation stretched into a third state.

Australia first entered the probe when Indian hospital registrar Mohammed Haneef, 27, was arrested in Brisbane, Queensland on Monday as he allegedly tried to leave the country on a one-way ticket.

He remains in custody but has not been charged. A court late Thursday granted police permission to hold him for an extra four days as the investigation broadens.

Haneef, who worked in Liverpool before finding work in Australia last September, is related to two of the medics held in Britain: Kafeel Ahmed, also known as Khalid or Khalim Ahmed, and his brother Sabeel Ahmed, reports say.

Kafeel Ahmed was reportedly one of two occupants of a burning and fuel-laden Jeep that was

Iran expects UN to hold off sanctions for now

AFP, Vienna

Iran expects the United Nations to hold off on new sanctions while Tehran pursues new talks with the UN atomic agency about its disputed nuclear work, a senior Iranian official said yesterday.

"Of course this is definitely the expectation because otherwise, as I've said, this positive, constructive environment will be in jeopardy and this whole peace might collapse," Iranian ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh told AFP in an interview.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's deputy director general for safeguards Olli Heinonen will visit Tehran next week to draw up a plan to resolve "outstanding issues" in an over four-year-old IAEA investigation of Iran's nuclear program, Soltanieh said.

This comes with Iran defying UN Security Council resolutions for it to suspend uranium enrichment, which makes nuclear reactor fuel but also atom bomb material, and to cooperate fully with the IAEA, which has unresolved questions about Iranian nuclear activities that could have military applications.

The Security Council has already imposed two sets of sanctions against Iran for its refusal to suspend enrichment.

The United States and its European allies plan to propose a third sanctions resolution.

But China's UN ambassador Wang Guangya on Tuesday urged the international community to boost diplomatic efforts to end the nuclear standoff with Iran, saying the time was not yet right for new sanctions.

Fertiliser crisis

FROM PAGE 1

Kumar Malakar. The probe body had collected hand-written description of the incident from some 50 persons including fertiliser-dealers, government staff and farmers.

Meanwhile, fertiliser distribution in Nachole resumed yesterday under the supervision of senior administrative officials and army personnel. The authorities decided to allocate 10kg urea for every farmer cultivating Aua on one bigha land.

Some 1,500 dealers in northern region, including 50 in Chapainawabganj and 10 in Nachole upazila, were appointed during the tenure of the BNP-led four-party coalition government. Most of them were outsiders which is in violation of the rules, said Malakar.

"The fact was known to us all but we could not take steps for fear of aggravating situations. If anyone inspects the godowns of these dealers and checks their sales, gross anomalies will be certainly found," he said.

Another committee member said, "During distribution of fertiliser, the government staff used to get a good amount of bribe from the dealers. The process has now stopped and this has irked them."

rammed into Glasgow airport's main terminal last weekend and was badly burned in the incident.

Unconfirmed media reports in Britain said Ahmed and the other man allegedly in the car, Bilal Abdulla, an Iraqi, left a suicide note to explain the attack.

The Ahmed brothers had also unsuccessfully applied for jobs in Western Australian hospitals in recent years, but were knocked back due to insufficient qualifications, the Australian Medical Association revealed.

A senior Scotland Yard counter-terrorism officer is in Australia to help with the investigation, as her colleagues in Britain race against time to question six of the suspects held in a London police station.

Meanwhile British police have stepped up security for the Tour de France, which gets under way on Saturday after a formal opening ceremony Friday in London's central Trafalgar Square.

British newspapers said detectives are probing the role Al-Qaeda might have played in the botched attacks, in which two Mercedes cars packed with gas canisters and nails were discovered in London a day before the Jeep rammed Glasgow airport.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh meanwhile offered Brown help in the probe, but urged people not to jump to conclusions over the nationalities of the suspects.

"We offered them all possible help in dealing with this, but I think labelling Indians as terrorists, Pakistanis as terrorists... I think, these labels are best avoided," he said.

People's role

FROM PAGE 1

guest at a discussion titled 'Role of media in the development of women and children' organised by non-governmental organisation Children and Women Vision Foundation at the National Press Club in the capital yesterday.

"Giving all the responsibilities upon the government is not enough. We have to come forward and work unitedly as it is not possible for the government to solve all the problems alone."

Despite many developments in matters concerning women and children, women in the country are still deprived of their due rights, he said.

Child marriage and inadequate scope for the women to work independently are the main obstacles in the way of women's development, he said adding in this regard the media can play a significant role as they have been doing for decades.

Describing the media as the vanguard of democracy, he said, "As the rays of sun destroy germs, independent media can resist misdeeds, corruption and crime in the society."

He hoped that the media will play their due role in the struggles ahead as it did at crucial junctures including the liberation movement.

Former chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission Margub Morshed said the women in the country have remained deprived for centuries as due attention was never paid to them.

"We cannot ensure the rights of women until we eradicate poverty and ensure education for all in the country," he said.

Founder and Secretary General of Children and Women Vision Foundation Gulshan-E-Yasmin, Chairman Ali Imam, Chief Adviser of ATN Bangla Saiful Bari, first women Brigadier General of the country Suraiya Rahman, eminent litterateur Chemon Ara and physician Ferdous Ara J Janan also spoke.

Nepal students plan to spoil king's party

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal student groups are planning protests to try and spoil embattled King Gyanendra's plans for a public celebration of his 60th birthday this weekend, leaders said yesterday.

Gyanendra, whose reign is opposed by fiercely republican Maoists who joined the government earlier this year, plans to throw open his pink palace in Kathmandu for well-wishers to greet him Saturday and stage a reception Sunday.

"As an individual he's entitled to celebrate his birthday but as the king he has no rights to hold a public felicitations," Ganesh Man Pun, president of the Young Communist League, told AFP.

The student and youth groups will stage rallies Friday and Saturday to try and prevent the birthday celebrations, student leaders announced.

"Student and youth leaders... have decided to appeal to all to foil the king's birthday celebrations," Gokul Gharti, general secretary of the All Nepal National Free Students Union said.

On Thursday, ambassadors from the United States, India, the European Union and elsewhere snubbed the king by announcing they would not attend his party.

The monarchy's fate is set to be decided after crucial elections in November to elect a body that will rewrite the constitution.

Gyanendra and his 238-year-old Shah dynasty came under grave threat after the Maoists and mainstream political parties made peace and formed a government earlier this year.

The king has already been stripped of most of his powers including his job as head of the armed forces.

Gyanendra came to the throne after the 2001 massacre of most of the royal family by a drink-and-drug-fuelled crown prince who later killed himself.

Rab recover

FROM PAGE 1

pipe gun from Bastuhara Colony (slum) ground under Khalishpur Police Station at about 6:00am yesterday.

Meanwhile, the law enforcement agencies have intensified their drives in Khulna district to arrest the listed criminals, including the outlaws and Islamist militants.

"We are trying hard to arrest the Islamist militants and extremists scattered in disguise at different places in the city and district," said Acting Police Commissioner Rashedun Ara.

Kaiser

FROM PAGE 1

that the proper practices will have to be ensured," he noted.

Saying that reform is a continuous process, he said, "I too want reforms, but I don't welcome the proposals of some senior leaders going beyond the party chief."

He went on to say that he was not taking it casually that the reforms should be carried out with Hasina excluded from the process as demanded by some senior party leaders.

Referring to Suranjit, he said the former lawmaker in his proposals has called for going back to the constitution of '72 and at the same time said that executive power should rest with the president of the country, this is simply contradictory and not acceptable.

But if parliament wants, that too could be done by amending the constitution, he added.

On Hasina's proposal for retirement from active politics at the age of 60, he said he does not support the idea. "The leaders in India remain active in politics till they are 70 or 80 years old," he observed.

Asked for reaction to detained AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil's letter to the chief adviser, he questioned the newsmen, "How come you know it was written by Jalil? Who told you that he said the party is under a despotic leadership?"

About some leaders including Razzak, Tofail and Amir Hossain Amu alleging that the absolute powers of its head are responsible for the "downfall" of the AL, he said the allegation is not true.

"The presidium used to meet in every two days before the stalled 22 January parliamentary election," he said.

Hasina's personal secretary Dr Hasan Mahmood was present among others.

Customs dockets

FROM PAGE 16

about this allegation.

The customs commissioner denied getting any information about destruction of any documents at Burimari port, and said no such corruption has yet been detected there.

Kamrul Islam also denied the allegation against him while Mozaffar Rahman could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.

Hilsha prices

FROM PAGE 16

trucks loaded with hilsha from Barisal that were scheduled for export to India.

Supply from different hilsha mokams (procurement centres) to Barisal exporters decreased while the exporters are now preserving their stocked fish in cold storages of Khulna and Jessore, reports our Barisal correspondent.

Zahir Sikdar, a wholesaler in Barisal, said he purchased standard-sized hilsha at Tk 3.10 lakh per tonne on Thursday, which was Tk 4.3 lakh per tonne on Wednesday.

The price came down 20 to 25 per cent after imposition of the ban on hilsha export and this tendency will continue for a few more days, he said.

But it may increase again if supply to Barisal region decreases due to the ban on legal export and smuggling increases at the catching points in the Bay, he added.

Fish exporters said if they cannot supply against the letters of credit that have been already opened by the importers, both the sides will sustain heavy losses and litigation may also arise.

The stopping of the legal way of export may lead to increased smuggling of hilsha from the points of catching in the Bay, they said, adding that the matter will also affect national economy, trade balance as well as foreign relationship.

Hailing the government decision, local civil society leaders said export of hilsha or any other item should be done after meeting the demands of the local markets to control the price.

The decision to postpone hilsha export was taken following a report by a fisheries and livestock ministry investigation team who visited Barisal, Bhola and Cox's Bazar, and talked to stakeholders to find out the cause of excessive dearness of hilsha fish in the peak season.

The team was formed against the backdrop of the high price of hilsha fish in the local market during the peak season and reported export of the item at lower prices to

8 Iraqi troops, GI killed

FROM PAGE 16

Green Zone in an area near Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's office and the US embassy.

Five explosions rocked the area at around 2:00 pm (1000 GMT) during the capital's weekly vehicle curfew, which was declared to protect worshippers attending mosques for Friday prayers.

It was not immediately clear if anyone was hurt in the blasts.

The Green Zone, a walled-in city district that protects the US and British embassies and several official Iraqi buildings, is a frequent target of mortar and rocket attacks launched by the city's warring factions.

US commanders have accused Iranian agents of supplying weapons to the groups and inciting them to fire on American targets, a charge denied by Tehran.

Iraq has executed an al-Qaeda fighter who carried out one of the first and deadliest bombings in Iraq's bloody sectarian war, an official said Friday.

"Oras Mohammed Abdul-Aziz, also known as Abu Omar Al-Kurdi from Mosul, was executed on July 3 at 11:00 am," justice ministry under-secretary Busho Ibrahim told AFP.

Gunmen fire shots

FROM PAGE 16

Musharraf has incurred the bitter enmity of Islamic militants who oppose his ties to the United States and his support for the overthrow of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan after 9/11.

In October 2006, security forces found rockets aimed at Musharraf's official residence in Islamabad while an explosion occurred near his army house in Rawalpindi. He said the incidents had possible links to al-Qaeda.

al-Qaeda was blamed for a suicide attack targeting Musharraf's motorcade on Christmas Day 2003 in Rawalpindi that left 14 people dead. He escaped unscathed.

Less than two weeks earlier he survived another assassination attempt when attackers blew up a bridge as his limousine passed, but electronic jamming equipment in the car delayed the blast.

Security forces have foiled at least two other major plots to kill Musharraf since he took power from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a military coup in 1999.

33 Taliban

FROM PAGE 16

Taliban were killed and their bodies are left at the battlefield." Defence forces were identifying the bodies, he said, and rebel weapons also littered the site.

The coalition said the fighting began overnight when Taliban tried to ambush a checkpoint in the area, which is in the Charchino district.