

Pakistanis want Musharraf to quit army

Survey shows

AFP, Islamabad

A poll released yesterday by an US think-tank showed most Pakistanis want military ruler President Pervez Musharraf to step down as head of the country's army.

The survey by the International Republican Institute found that 62 percent of respondents thought Musharraf should resign as army chief, while 59 percent said that elections held while he continues to wear his military uniform were unlikely to be free and fair.

The institute, a Washington-based non-governmental organisation, said it interviewed a randomly selected 4,000 adult men and women in 60 districts across Pakistan between June 13 and July 3.

It said the survey aimed to present a "comprehensive analysis of attitudes regarding the Pakistani political landscape."

The survey found that 62 percent of people were opposed to Musharraf being elected to a second term by the current assemblies.

Asked if the army should play a role in civilian government, 55 percent said it should not, while 40 percent believed it should.

However, 48 percent said they would support Musharraf's re-election if he first resigned from the army, called parliamentary elections, and then sought re-election from the new assemblies.

Forty-seven percent of those surveyed supported a pre-election power sharing deal between former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, currently living in self-imposed exile, and Musharraf, while 37 percent said they opposed such a move.

Benazir and Musharraf held secret talks in Abu Dhabi last month on a deal but they reached no agreement on two key issues, Pakistani officials have said.

The sticking points were Musharraf's dual role as president and head of Pakistan's powerful army and a rule that prevents Benazir serving a third term as premier.

Musharraf took power in a military coup in October 1999, toppling the elected government of Nawaz Sharif, who was later sent into exile.

Both Sharif and Benazir have said they wish to return to Pakistan to contest elections slated for early next year.

A decision by Musharraf on

Thursday not to impose emergency rule, contrary to advice from political aides, would have provided ammunition to his political rivals by derailing a return to the democratic process.

This is because it would have automatically extended the life of the current parliament for another year.

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Thursday began deliberating on Sharif's application to have his exile overturned and be permitted to return to the country.

Sharif lodged his appeal earlier this month to end his seven years of exile. He still officially heads his faction of the conservative Pakistan Muslim League party from

exile, while Benazir leads the centrist Pakistan People's Party.

Wajid Hasan, a former Pakistani high commissioner to London and now an adviser to Benazir, told AFP that a declaration of emergency rule would have been a blow to Musharraf's standing and would have likely led to a legal challenge from opposition parties.

General elections are due by early 2008.

The International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based think-tank, said last month that Pakistan is in danger of failing as a state unless Musharraf's military government restores democracy by holding free and fair elections this year.



Leader of the visiting Chinese military delegation General Chen Bingde pays a courtesy call on Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal S M Ziaur Rahman at his office in the city yesterday.

Moscow's richest 41 times richer than poorest

AFP, Moscow

The richest 10 percent of Muscovites are 41 times richer than the poorest 10 percent, a gap that dwarfs the national divide, Russia's state statistics service said yesterday.

"Moscow's richest 10 percent earned 41 times more in 2006 than the poorest 10 percent," state statistics service assistant director Leonid Arshon told AFP.

Nationwide, there was a 15-fold gap in earnings, he said - up from a gap of 10 times in 2001 and 14 times in 2003.

Russian Academy of Sciences economist Ruslan Grinberg warned that in countries where the gap is a factor of 10 or higher, "the conditions are created for social disorder."

"The only place that rule doesn't hold is in America, where the coefficient holds steady at 10-12. But there it is considered normal, since their philosophy differs from ours," he told daily newspaper Izvestia.



Brac distributes relief among the flood-affected people at Koy Ketan in Manikganj yesterday.

Star Jute Mills workers resume work

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Workers of the state-owned Star Jute Mills (SJM) resumed their work from the morning shift yesterday as the authorities agreed to pay their arrear wages of two out of three weeks.

Production in the mill remained suspended since last Sunday as 2,041 workers stopped working in protest against non-payment of arrear wages for three weeks.

The mill has incurred a loss of Tk 40 lakh due to suspension of production by the workers, said Deputy General Manager Shafique Islam.

The mill is able to produce at least 28 metric tonnes of products on an average everyday, he added.

Mill closure bankrupts over 2,000 traders

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"Though I've stopped selling goods on credit, we could not press labourers for paying their arrears in this situation. At the same moment, I don't know how I would repay my loan taken by mortgaging my house," said Faruk, a grocer, who loaned Tk 20,000 from a bank.

A labourer on an average owes to small traders ranging from Tk 500 to Tk 15,000, which has been piled up over the last few months due to non-payment of their wages.

The small traders, some of who include the mill officers, employees and labourers, were solely dependent on their business.

They used to trade in grocery, food, cosmetics, restaurant, confectionery, jewellery, pharmaceuticals and clothes, while the vendors used to sell bread, sherbet, boiled eggs and seasonal fruit.

"We know we would be paid back once the labourers are paid. But how long a small trader like me can wait when they are in debt to so many people," said Shaheen. He

deserted his makeshift business two months ago and now pulls rickshaw. He is to get about Tk 5,000 due to labourers.

Russell Store, a grocery owned by Khalil, has Tk 35,000 due to the labourers. Suppliers have stopped providing him with g

"My shop is becoming empty gradually which was rich in products in the immediate past. I fear I wouldn't get back even half of my capital," said Khalil.

"Once I get the dues or even half of it, I will stop the business immediately. Otherwise, what else can I do now?"

Khalil established the store taking Tk 1 lakh loan on 12 percent interest mortgaging his house.

"The suppliers have stopped giving me goods on credit saying there is no business left in Khalishpur. Some of my nearby suppliers stopped their business while some others changed business and became vegetable suppliers."

The rent of Russell Store's space

is Tk 4,000 a month and Khalil could not pay the last three months' rent. Earlier, the sale of his shop was Tk 900 each day, which is reduced to Tk 200, hardly to Tk 300.

Owner of Mat Store Nizamuddin in the same area took Tk 25,000 loan from an NGO and his dues now stand at Tk 10,000.

"I buy goods from different suppliers at different places. But it's getting tough day by day to convince them for goods on credit," he said.

"The mill has died and my investment would not return if I continue giving products on credit to small traders. I have stopped selling products on credit," said Kamal, a supplier of grocery materials at Chitrali Bazar.

Kamal had set up his own grocery taking Tk 4 lakh loan on 15 percent interest mortgaging his house and land. Earlier, his per day sale was Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000, which has now been reduced to Tk 7 thousand to Tk 10 thousand. His outstanding bills due to the labourers are Tk 10 lakh to Tk 12 lakh.

A wholesaler on Kalibar Road said, "Suppliers owe to me Tk 30 lakh, which exists only on papers now."

"Some of the suppliers have left for home without paying me any money they took on credit," he said preferring anonymity in fear of action by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

The wholesalers have initiated a process by giving fewer goods than the money paid by suppliers to gradually lessen their piled up arrears. But the suppliers are also not in any better condition, nor the jobless consumers, who once belonged to the workers of a running mill.

Life is hampered everywhere in Khalishpur. Happiness disappears from the minds of the people, who are taking preparations for leave. Once a profit-making region, Khalishpur is dying.

Poor work condition

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at field level. There are 87,934 constables in the police force.

A constable now starts his career in the department with a monthly salary of Tk 4,112 and daily duty of 14 hours, which often goes up to 18 hours but for no extra payment.

"I leave the barracks for duty at 6:00pm and return at 8 in the morning the next day. Often I have to go out for duty after only two hours' sleep," said a constable at the Mirpur Police Barracks.

Another policeman of the same rank said, "I have to pay Tk 2,200 for house rent and with the rest [of Tk 4,112] I have to run my four-member family and other expenses... Nobody can imagine how we maintain life amid extreme rise in prices of all essentials."

He said, "I am running 29 but I cannot think of wedding. My two younger sisters are yet to be married off. My mother is becoming ill thinking of me."

An SI who leads field operations in different drives said quality service cannot be expected from them until logistic support and enhanced work condition are ensured.

"If just human treatment and logistic facilities could be ensured, police service in the country will be immensely improved," said an SI of Ramna Police Station.

An SI who has a government motorcycle gets around 1.7 litre fuel a day but one who does not have a government motorbike gets around Tk 3 a day as conveyance allowance although he has to travel to many places for investigation purposes besides his regular duties. On the other hand, an SI who has his own motorbike gets only Tk 127 a month for fuel cost.

A policeman of this rank gets Tk 333 a month as risk allowance, Tk 300 as subsistence allowance, Tk 25 as cleaning allowance and Tk 100 as tiffin allowance. Many alleged that most often they do not get the risk allowances of the last two or three months of a year.

"How can one expect 'service' from a person whose fundamental human demands remain unmet?" said an SI of a model police station in the city requesting anonymity.

A few policemen acknowledged their involvement in various illegal means to earn extra money to maintain their life, but they said it is under the existing inhuman circumstances that they are forced to

resort to such illegal means.

Policemen between the ranks of constable and SI said they have to remain on duty for a minimum of 12 hours a day. When on patrol or outside police station, a constable usually performs 18 to 22 hours' duty a day.

"After the caretaker government took over following expiry of the BNP-led four-party alliance government's tenure, I had to perform duty for even four days without any break," said an SI.

Moreover, after the regular 12-hour-duty, almost every SI has to find time for investigation of different cases assigned to them.

An SI at a police station in the capital has 20-30 cases on an average to investigate.

"Is it possible to behave normally with hundreds of people after performing duties for such long hours?" an SI said. He said they never get any allowance as overtime and conveyance and that the investigation officers themselves have to manage the money needed for investigating different cases.

An SI of Mirpur Police Station said every night they have to deploy 10 mobile teams on an average to watch the most crime prone areas, but the police station has only six vehicles. Even the SIs often have to bear the fuel cost for the vehicles requisitioned for patrol duty.

The policemen said they are entitled to 20 days of casual leave and 28 days of other leaves a year, but they can hardly enjoy a full leave. They also alleged that the food they are supplied are of low quality.

A number of constables living at the Rajarbagh Police Lines said there is severe accommodation crisis in the lines. When a policeman returns to the lines after long hours of duty he finds his bed occupied by a fellow colleague.

Forces living in the barracks said water at the barracks bathrooms gets exhausted within two hours of the return of a batch of policemen from duties. "Most days many of us have to go out for duties without having a shower," said a constable.

They said the authorities even take 15-20 days to repair a fan or change a bulb in the rooms.

At least seven SIs live in a room at the Ramna Police Station with one television set as their only means of entertainment.