

Nepal polls called off over Maoist demand

AFP, Kathmandu

Elections to decide Nepal's future were postponed indefinitely yesterday, ministers said, as government and Maoists squabbled over the fate of the monarchy and election systems.

The polls scheduled for November 22 were a key element of a peace deal sealed last year that ended a civil war launched in 1996 by the Maoists, who are demanding the abolition of the monarchy.

"The seven party leaders (of the coalition government) have agreed to postpone the constituent assembly elections for an indefinite period," Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel told AFP.

Voters were to elect a body to rewrite Nepal's constitution and decide the fate of the Himalayan country's embattled monarchy.

The government has decided to call a special session of parliament on October 11 to discuss the Maoists' demands, Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat told AFP.

The seven parties in the coalition government issued a joint statement shortly after the postponement was announced, urging impoverished Nepal's donors to continue their support of the peace process.

"We regret the postponement of the elections but we want to assure people that we are committed to hold constituent assembly elections and a new date will be fixed soon," the statement said.

"We hope that the international community and the United Nations will continue their support of the ongoing peace process."

The head of the UN mission to Nepal's peace process said the postponement was disappointing and the political parties and Maoists needed to prepare in earnest for rescheduled elections.

What is important now is that the political parties maintain their alliance and reach political agreements

Green chilli

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The wholesalers of Karwan Bazar gave different reasons for the price hike of onions. Some said they had to purchase it at a higher price while some said the increase in demand on the eve of Eid was responsible for the price hike.

Our correspondent in Khulna reported that onion was selling at Tk 48 per kg yesterday, which was Tk 36 last week.

Wholesalers said the price of onions might go up even further as import from India through Benapole border remains suspended since October 1. Quoting importers, they said the government of India stopped the export of onions following a price hike there.

Khulna district administration opened a cell to monitor the onion price situation and to stop hoarding of onions.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports: Onions were selling at different kitchen markets in the city at Tk 42-43/kg.

Traders, both in retail and wholesale markets, blamed poor supply as well as the Indian government's recent decision to suspend onion export for 15 days for the rising prices.

Meanwhile, powder milk of different brands including Nido, Dano, Diplomia and Fresh saw a sharp rise in their prices at retail markets while the price of pasteurised milk fluctuated wantonly at different markets during the last few days.

The 2.5kg pack of Nido powder milk rose to Tk 1,450, which was selling at Tk 1,250 four days ago, while the 200gm pack leapt to Tk 200 from Tk 165.

The 2kg pack of Dano powder milk rose to Tk 980 from last week's Tk 960. The one kg pack of Diplomia powder milk rose to Tk 418 from Tk 392. The one kg pack of Fresh powder milk was selling at Tk 410 yesterday, it

GSP hearing

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Humayun sought assistance from the international community to enhance capacity to further improve labour rights situation in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh embassy in Washington in a press release said the hearing is the beginning of a year-long review process that will examine verbal and written submissions and testimonies by all parties as well as determine the actual progress on the ground to come to a conclusion on an appeal by a US rights group for withdrawal of the GSP facilities for Bangladesh.

Ms Marideth Joy Sandler, executive director of GSP programme at the USIT, chaired the hearing.

Mr Jeffrey Vogt, global economic specialist of the rights body American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO), in defence of their petition highlighted the violations of labour rights in the export processing zones (EPZs), in ready-made garment (RMG) and shrimp industries in Bangladesh.

Vogt recognised that some progress has been made in recent years but said the progress was still unsatisfactory.

He suggested that more aggressive reforms are needed to protect labour rights in Bangladesh.

In response to specific queries about their objective in filing the petition, he said they want Bangladesh government to accord more priorities to ensure that labour

13 AL leaders freed on bail in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

to create the conditions for a credible constituent assembly election," UN representative Ian Martin said.

"There is no doubt that the UN and member states will remain committed to supporting the Nepal peace process," he added.

As part of last November's peace deal, the UN was invited to supervise Maoist weapons and soldiers who were confined to camps around the country as well as assist in the polls.

A spokesman said Nepal's Election Commission was ready to hold the November 22 polls and the delay was worrying.

"We had everything in place. The decision by the political parties has created a lot of confusion. The election commission is meeting regarding what to do next," said Laxman Bhattachar, the election commission spokesman.

The fiercely republican Maoists have been pushing hard for the immediate abolition of the monarchy as well as the a change to the election system.

After agreeing to polls with a mixed first-past-the-post and proportional representation system, the ex-rebels demanded full proportional voting.

They vowed to disrupt the November ballot if mainstream parties refused their demands.

Analysts say the ultra-leftists have grown fearful of the elections as popular support has plummeted because of their continued strong-arm tactics and bloody unrest in the semi-autonomous Terai region.

The delay could open the way to further unrest, a political analyst warned.

"The postponement has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and the very legitimacy and credibility of the government has come into question," said Kapil Shrestha, a political science professor at Nepal's Tribhuvan University.

"This will have national and international repercussions," he said.

Envoy in KL

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assured the Bangladeshi envoy that all Bangladeshi workers, who have been given approval but are yet to arrive in Malaysia, will be allowed to enter the country, the high commissioner told Malaysian newspaper The Star Online.

According to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Malaysia approved three lakh Bangladeshi workers, of whom over one lakh are yet to leave Dhaka.

"The Home Affairs Ministry [of Malaysia] assured me that all previous approvals would be honoured," Khairuzzaman said, adding, "Things will be better handled this time." He said, "The measures are already in place and we will work closely with all parties involved."

Malaysia imposed the freeze on hiring workers from Bangladesh as many migrant workers remained unemployed, were not paid their salaries and other facilities as per contracts. A several thousand of them also got stuck at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport as their employers did not pick them up.

The Malaysian government in the latest agreements has made it mandatory that Bangladeshi workers not picked up within 24 hours of their arrival at the Kuala Lumpur Airport will be moved to an immigration depot where they will be kept for 72 hours before being deported.

Announcing the ban, Malaysian Home Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Radzi Sheikh Ahmad said the lackadaisical attitude of employers and local agents, especially in picking up the workers upon arrival, had created a big problem for the authorities.

The price of flour rose by Tk 2.3 per kg while prices of both local and farm chicken increased.

Price of four medium-sized local chicken leapt to Tk 450 from Tk 350 during the last four days while the price of farm chicken rose by Tk 10 per kg.

However, prices of spices, vegetables including aubergine, bitter gourd, patiala chichinga and jhinga dropped slightly at different kitchen markets in the capital.

Social problems created by foreign workers were also one of the reasons for the announcement of the freeze, he said.

Cold weather

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the Bay of Bengal.

"The situation will end with a rainfall. But we do not see any possibility of rainfall before next three-four days," said Samarendra Karmakar, director of the Met office.

The current spell of sultry weather has been causing coughing and viral fever.

The depression has been staying over the west central Bay and adjoining northwest area and it is likely to intensify further and move in a northwesterly direction, said a Met office bulletin.

In the bulletin, the Met office asked all fishing boats and trawlers in north Bay and deep sea to come close to the coast and proceed with caution until further notice.

\$60,000 seized

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to Patenga Police Station. A case was filed with the police station.

Acting on a tip-off, the coastguard members stopped a private car near Air Force gate at around 1:30pm. After a search, they found 60 pieces of one-hundred-dollar (US) bills amounting to Tk 42 lakh hidden in soap packets and milk containers.

During interrogation Mizan told the law enforcers that he went to the airport to receive expatriate Md Mohsin, 36, son of Mahbubul Huq of Fatikchhari, who returned home from Dubai in a Biman flight (BG 048) at around 10:30am.

Lt Commander Asaduzzaman of Bangladesh Coastguard quoted Mizan as saying that Mohsin gave Mizan the goods to carry and went away in a CNG-run auto rickshaw. The PDB's departments

Bhuiyan for fair trial

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thinking that if he and new Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain sit for a negotiation, all the problems will be solved, Bhuiyan said personal amity is not the issue, rather political differences have to be resolved.

"I respect him [Delwar] as an elder, but it is not correct to think that political unity will be achieved only by sitting together," he said hoping that a political unity will somehow be achieved between the feuding factions of the party.

Asked if he is taking any initiative to unite the party again, he said they are heading to that direction, albeit cautiously. Everything will be achieved after an appropriate environment is created, he added.

When asked if he is taking any initiative to unite the party again, he said they are heading to that direction, albeit cautiously. Everything will be achieved after an appropriate environment is created, he added.

"I want to maintain the unity of the party as the election is coming near, unity and reforms both are important for the party as we don't want to go back to the situation that existed in the country before 1/11," he said adding that he is ready to accept the decision of the party council regarding his reform proposals.

"We have to create a corruption free society to establish democracy and good governance in the country," he said adding that all should cooperate in that endeavour.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia expelled Bhuiyan and joint secretary general Ashraf Hossain from the party and appointed Khandaker Delwar Hossain as the new secretary general, the day before her arrest, but Bhuiyan dismissed the order by terming it a violation of the party constitution.

When asked about the price hike of essentials and probable lifting of the state of emergency, Bhuiyan said those are matters of the government and it will be responsible for its actions.

SYLHET BLAST Verdict in two cases tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Judgment in two of the six cases filed in connection with the bomb blasts at Sunamganj district headquarters on August 17, 2005, will be pronounced tomorrow.

Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal Judge Dipoyman Sarker fixed the date on Thursday.

The activists of the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) exploded bombs near Bar Association and DC's offices, Judge's Court premises, Eidgah, Mollipur and bus stand areas.

Police submitted charge sheets against JMB operatives Abdul Aziz alias Hanif and Salahuddin alias Salehi for the blasts. Abdul Aziz gave a confession statement before the court.

"We have to create a corruption free society to establish democracy and good governance in the country," he said adding that all should cooperate in that endeavour.

Besides, the Speedy Trial Tribunal awarded Aziz 14 years' rigorous imprisonment on September 12 for storing explosives at a house rented for JMB men in Sylhet city.

Suu Kyi

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small-scale protests after a massive mid-August hike in fuel prices but swelled into the biggest threat to the hardline regime since student-led demonstrations in 1988, which were put down in a massacre.

Although the security presence on Yangon's streets has eased, soldiers continue to enforce a curfew and raid activists' home overnight, residents say. Many Yangon monasteries are empty, leaving neighbours to wonder if the monks have been arrested, injured or worse.

Amid this week's flurry of international diplomacy, Gambari was due to brief the UN Security Council later Friday on his four-day mission to Myanmar, but China signalled early that it would block efforts to punish Myanmar.

China's UN Ambassador Wang Guangya, whose country, along with India, has close ties to Myanmar, said Thursday that Beijing still regarded the crisis there as an internal matter and rejected the idea of punitive measures.

"No internationally imposed solution can help the situation," Wang said.

India, which has been under fire for its low-key reaction, called for Aug 30 Suu Kyi's release, saying she can "contribute to the emergence of Myanmar as a democratic country."

Thailand's Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont and Singapore's Premier Lee Hsien Loong agreed to send some foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to Myanmar next month, a Thai government statement said.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner also said he would soon travel to the Southeast Asia region to press for change, while Brazil unveiled plans to send a team of observers.

The UN high commissioner for human rights, Louise Arbour, called on Myanmar to allow rights monitors to enter the country, pointing to "pretty alarming" signs of abuses.

Agri ministry

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borrowed money to recover from lost crops and lost them again to floods are facing problems, as they would not get any harvest this season.

"So those farmers need help for their winter crops," said an official from the department of agriculture extension.

The first spell of floods started July 18 and stayed for three weeks and the second spell of flood that stayed for two weeks started in September 6.

According to the official data of agriculture ministry, crops, including Aus, Amon, vegetables, on 4,12,940 hectares were totally damaged while crops on 3,47,406 hectares of land were partially damaged, out of the 32,86,959 hectares of cultivable land of the country.

According to agriculturists, the second spell of floods damaged crops irreversibly since the farmers had no time to cultivate again. After the first spell, many farmers cultivated the late variety of crops.

Director of agriculture monitoring, under the department of agriculture extension, said, "We are yet to estimate the damage to crops caused by the floods."

The department of agriculture tried its best to minimise losses by taking a number of quick initiatives, including providing paddy seedlings and seeds to the farmers, he added.

RMG workers

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Garment Factory in Dhaka EPZ and an export-oriented garment factory at Jamgara stopped their work and demonstrated on the same demands.

Police later brought the situation under control.

Tree lover

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government land so that nobody, not even his own children, can claim ownership of those trees in future.

Alimuddin's son Bhutto Pramanik often used to accompany him in planting trees. Bhutto said his father used to buy or collect the palm seeds from people. He would request students to bring the palm seeds wasted in their houses.

Thus Alimuddin planted 15,000 palm and date trees and a few coconut and rain trees from 1982 to 1987.

"The price of the 12,500 palm trees and 2,500 date trees my father had planted would be around Tk 3 crore at present," said Bhutto, who does not have the means to buy even their daily bread.

Asked why Alimuddin planted mostly palm and date trees, his son said cows and goats do not eat these trees, so the trees do not need extra care.

Children of Alimuddin are very proud of their father, who sacrificed his money, even his children's fortune, for the sake of environment.

Bhutto said once his father had 23 bighas of cultivable land but he sold them to maintain his family and plant trees. Later, at old age Alimuddin took a job at a brick kiln.

But Alimuddin is yet to receive any government recognition for his deed. Locals remember Alimuddin but no government agency has ever inquired who planted those trees.

The government has not even taken any initiative to save the