

Italian PM Prodi quits after losing Senate vote

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi resigned on Thursday following 20 rocky months in office after the centre-left leader lost a vote of confidence in the Senate.

President Giorgio Napolitano asked Prodi to continue in office as the head of state holds consultations with political leaders, beginning Friday afternoon with the speakers of the Senate and the lower house Chamber of Deputies, the president's office said in a statement.

Prodi, 68, crippled by the defection this week of the centrist Catholic UDEUR party, had decided to go ahead with the Senate showdown despite appeals from top leaders, including Napolitano, to resign instead.

The mild-mannered former economics professor appeared resigned to the near certainty that he would lose the vote but determined to carry through with his principle.

"I am here because you cannot hide from the judgement of those who represent the people, and our

people are watching us," he said beforehand.

Despite a last-minute change of heart by one of UDEUR's three senators and the support of five of Italy's unelected senators for life including 98-year-old Rita Levi-Montalcini, Prodi fell five votes short in the upper house.

Predicting that Prodi would "go for broke" in the Senate, the daily Corriere della Sera had said Thursday: "We have all the ingredients of a political suicide broadcast live."

Tension ahead of the vote spilled over into open acrimony and high drama when UDEUR member Nuccio Cusumano announced to the chamber that he had changed his mind and would vote for Prodi.

UDEUR's Senate group leader Tommaso Barbato, beside himself with rage, hurled insults at Cusumano, who broke down in tears and was carried out of the chamber on a stretcher.

The president, following consultations with party and parliamentary leaders, can either call early elections or set up a transitional government.

Tk 1.4 cr Saudi currencies seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs authorities at Zia International Airport (ZIA) seized 8.10 lakh Saudi riyal worth about Tk 1.40 crore from two Singapore bound passengers on Thursday night.

They also arrested the two passengers, Mukul Hasan and Omar Faruk, in this connection.

Customs sources said they found the currencies hidden in two clay pots, which they kept inside their luggage.

Two separate cases were filed yesterday with Airport Police Station under Special Powers Act and Money Laundering Act.

Bali meet

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culture of corruption with an environment of integrity."

A key item on the meeting's agenda will be to create a means to review the treaty's implementation.

"The UN anti-corruption convention provides benchmarks to plug holes in domestic legislation and strengthen national capacity to fight corruption," added the UNODC official whose office is custodian of the convention.

"An effective review mechanism will ensure that this powerful piece of international law lives up to its potential."

To promote a greater engagement of the civil society in the fight against corruption, a number of special events will take place in Bali.

One of such events will gather one senior journalist from each of the least developed countries (LDCs) that have ratified the convention. Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritania, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen are among the LDCs.

Renowned journalists, who have devoted their careers to reporting on corruption, will participate in a peer-to-peer media forum during the conference.

The goal of the media forum is to provide an international stage for the media from developed and developing countries to unite and lend each other support on an issue of global concern.

Of the other special events, the launch of UNDP Asia-Pacific Human Development Report on Corruption, and Human Development and Artists for Integrity will take place on January 28, ministerial roundtable on Asset Recovery and Forum for Non-Governmental Organisations on January 29, Business Coalition: The UN Convention against Corruption as a New Market Force on January 30, and Peer-to-Peer Media Forum: Covering Corruption with Integrity on January 31.

Discussion

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development to improve the status of the poor to fight against terrorism and extremism.

Fakhrudin said a quiet social change in Bangladesh is underway to ensure economic stability through micro-credit and non-formal education.

Ensuring safe and fair holding of the February 18 parliamentary elections in Pakistan, Musharraf said international audiences should not judge Pakistan's political system by inapplicable standards.

The session began with an expression of partnership and cooperation in resolving instability as Musharraf and Karzai shook hands on stage.

Musharraf said, "The election must be fair, free and transparent. And I have added a new word—we will make sure they will be peaceful."

Asked later about last year's dismissal of the chief justice of Pakistan Supreme Judicial Court—the entity that would also resolve any questions about election fraud—Musharraf urged his audience not to impose on Pakistan "misperceived ideas of human rights or Western views of human rights."

He said, "Please look at Pakistan from Pakistan's eyes and not from anybody else's eyes. We also believe in these ideals but give us some time." He pointed to a number of regulations his government instituted to ensure fairness in elections.

Musharraf and the other leaders stressed the importance of economic development in reducing extremism and fostering democracy.

Regarding security in Iraq, Barham Salih referred to the positive developments in Anbar province, saying, "I can say, maybe for the first time, Iraq is on the road to winning."

CA: Help Dhaka

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"Bangladesh is importing rice from India, a natural supplier of the country," he said, appreciating the Indian government for allowing Bangladesh to import a fair quantity of rice. He said the process of importing the rice from India is going to be finalised.

He said beyond the Safta, India has agreed to import eight million pieces of garments from Bangladesh. Fakhrudin hoped that some more Bangladeshi goods would have access to the Indian market without any impediments.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Ambassador Debapriya Bhattacharya and chief adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim were present at the press conference.

The Chief Adviser is expected to return home today.

Chilly wind, drizzles

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The lowest temperature in the country yesterday -- 12 degrees Celsius--was recorded at Dinajpur. In Dhaka, the lowest temperature was 15.3 degrees.

Dhaka, Khulna, Barisal, Jessore, Patuakhali and many other areas of the country experienced rainfall, the Metoffice said.

In the capital, difference of minimum and maximum temperature was only 2.4 degrees Celsius causing the biting cold.

People living in the open were seen covering themselves and their belongings with polythene sheets.

Price of many items in kitchen markets further shot up yesterday as supply was disrupted.

Our correspondents in Rajshahi, Rangpur and Bogra report: A cold wave swept the districts for the last three days, coupled with drizzles.

Hundreds of people living on streets, river embankments and open spaces suffered the most.

The district administration of Rangpur sought 20,000 pieces of blankets and equal numbers of sweaters, jackets and children's clothes for distribution among distressed people.

Our correspondents in southern districts reported that severe cold and rains affected economic and other activities in the entire region yesterday.

Met office sources said the highest and the lowest temperatures in the region on the day were almost the same.

A BSS report from Barisal quoting Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital sources said cold-related diseases are spreading among the children and elderly people in the city.

About 800 children and 600 aged people were already treated at the hospital.

Our Khulna correspondent reports: Suffering of Sidr-hit homeless people in Bagerhat district further worsened owing to drizzles and severe cold. They are badly in need of warm clothes.

Our Magura correspondent says the cold wave has made lives of people, specially the poor and homeless miserable.

Official sources said cold-related diseases are spreading. Patients suffering from bronchitis and asthma are crowding the Sadar Hospital in the district town.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reported that an increasing number of children are being attacked mainly with pneumonia and other respiratory diseases as a cold wave persists. At the 100-bed Sadar Hospital in the district town, the children's ward with 12 beds have about four times the number of such patients. Besides, 100 children are being treated at the outdoor every day.

Over 400 crows die

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town died in last consecutive two days. Locals and district livestock officials said the birds died in Purn Bazar of town. Two dead birds were sent to Barisal and Dhaka on Tuesday to ascertain the cause of death. On Thursday evening lab reports revealed that the crows died of bird flu.

Meanwhile, 4,716 chickens, ducks and pigeons have been culled at farms in and around Rajbari of Dinajpur town after bird flu was detected in the area.

Sources said the culling started Thursday night and went on till yesterday afternoon.

District Livestock Officer AKM Nurzamal said 2,000 birds were culled in the town's Rajbari, Katapara and Rajarampur area after bird flu was confirmed at three farms on January 19. Birds in seven other farms were later infected with the virus.

Mentioning that there is no need to panic, he said the authorities concerned have decided to use megaphones to make people aware of the disease. There has also been strong monitoring of the border with India so that no birds are brought into the country as there is a bird flu outbreak in North Shilliguri, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Coochbihar districts of West Bengal in India.

District administration of Patuakhali and Barguna yesterday declared their districts as bird flu affected area.

Patuakhali authorities culled about 3,000 domestic birds in the town Thursday night while over 4,000 domestic birds were culled in Barguna three days ago.

They also declared a three-month ban on trading of such birds in the districts.

Abu Taher, Patuakhali district livestock officer yesterday said at least 2,640 domestic birds were culled with the help of police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), and army personnel. They also destroyed 1,155 eggs.

The culling took place at farms and houses in Nutan Bazar, Chawk Bazar, Purn Bazar, Katpatti, College Road areas and they were buried near Lawkathi of the Sadar upazila.

Ganges project

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idea of excavating any new canal, rather using the rivers and the system of canals that exist already.

It would help to improve the current situation of the people and the environment as it would increase fish production and irrigation, and would also improve navigability of the rivers, he said.

"Appropriate use of water from Ganges Barrage would increase sweet water flow in the rivers and canals of the Sundarbans, saving a portion of it," he added.

During a recent visit to the Sundarbans, rivers and small canals were found heavily silted with no big boat being able to navigate through them during low tides, not even through bigger rivers like the Goral and Madhumati.

Md Mobarak Hossain, an engine boat owner from the Sundarbans, said he cannot navigate through the rivers and canals there even with his small country boat during low tides.

"The situation is the same at Jamtala, Boyar khal, Kotka, Kochikhali, and Nikamal -- almost everywhere. During low tides we cannot navigate through small canals but the situation was not like this just five years ago," said Mobarak.

Sources in Water Development Board said following the water treaty with India in 1996, Water Resources Planning Organisation (Warpo) did a preliminary study on Ganges Barrage and made recommendations to the government.

Before starting construction, the government intended to do a feasibility study on engineering planning, environmental impacts and the cost.

Following Warpo recommendations in 2005, the erstwhile government took initiatives to appoint consultants for the study, and even signed a contract with a company, but the work order is yet to be awarded to the company. The government even opened an office for 'Feasibility of Ganges Barrage Project', but the whole office with its staff has been sitting idle for years, as there has been no work for them.

"Right now we don't have many staff. But we will need more staff once we start working," Engineer Abdul Matin Bhuiyan, the director of the project, said yesterday.

Now the people of the south-western part of the country, which is 37 per cent of the total land area and depended on the Ganges river system, are suffering severely from salinity in the rivers, as they are heavily silted. The sufferings of the people have been on since the Indian government built Farakka Barrage in 1975, reducing water flow in the Ganga river system.

Dr Azizur Rahman, a water resources expert now working with Development Design Consultants Ltd, said if Ganges Barrage is built, the increased water flow would wash out the silts from the river bed. Besides, under the project, rivers and canals would also be dredged, resulting in reduction of the inundation problem in the south-western region including the areas around Bhabadaha and Beel Dakatia.

TALKS WITH CA Dutch PM offers water management expertise

UNB, Davos, Switzerland

The Netherlands yesterday offered its expertise in water management in Bangladesh as Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende held bilateral talks with Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum's (WEF) meeting.

"We've had a fruitful meeting," the Dutch prime minister told journalists after the meeting with the chief adviser at the Congress Centre, the venue of the WEF meeting.

Offering condolence to the victims of Cyclone Sidr, he said the Netherlands expresses solidarity with Bangladesh.

He said they discussed political situation, elections, human rights and the fight against corruption in Bangladesh.

The Dutch prime minister welcomed the roadmap for holding the elections in Bangladesh.

The Dutch premier also recalled his meeting with the chief adviser on the sidelines of UNGA session in New York in September last.

The chief adviser told the reporters that he has explained his government's reforms, preparations for the elections and other activities, which the Dutch prime minister has appreciated.

Mittal Group Chairman LN Mittal had an informal interaction with the chief adviser at the centre.

Former BNP MP sued for illegal sand lifting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP lawmaker Fazlul Huq Milon has been sued for lifting sand illegally from the shoals of the Shitalakhyia.

Md Shamsuddin, assistant land officer of Kaliganj Land Office, filed the case with Kaliganj Police Station yesterday.

Six leaders of BNP, Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal and Chhatra Dal (JCD) were also made co-accused in the case. They are Kaliganj JCD President Masud Rana, Kaliganj BNP joint secretaries Farid Ahmed, Arab Ali and Shahidul Islam, and Juba Dal leaders Mithu and Lablu.

In the case statement, the complainant said the accused illegally lifted sand from the shoals of the river from October 2004 to October 2006.

Locals loot bricks

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Daily Star that locals are stealing hundreds of thousands of bricks, digging holes or farming in the 40 reserved sites in and around Pundra Nagar.

Pundra Nagar is a city that holds relics from the Maurya, Shangu, Gupta, Pal and Sen eras dating back to at least 2,000 years.

"People cannot do anything about it because of legal complications," Alam said adding that hundreds of people obtained fake documents to grab land within the fenced area declared reserved in 1922. Pundra Nagar covers a 2.25 crore square foot area.

According to government rules, any archaeological or private digging within a four-mile radius of Pundra Nagar requires permission from the deputy commissioner's (DC) office. But, the DC officials say that no such permission has been taken from them to construct houses or farms in the area.

A number of officials from the geological survey department are alleged to have been involved in encouraging encroachment through forged documents.

At least three people were seen building concrete buildings in or around Pundra Nagar who seem to have paid well below the market rate of land in the area.

Builders were seen using bricks from thousand-year-old houses to build their own, which has damaged the structures of most of the buildings.

Father, son

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informed police that Jewel's father Halim also remained missing since Monday. Police then searched the area and found Halim's body in a hole on the farmland.

Jewel's brother-in-law Noor Mohammad told reporters that both the father and son had been driving their own maxi on the Dhamrai-Nabinagar route.

He said Halim and Jewel went missing since 2:00am on Monday when they were on way home after refilling gas from a filling station.

Halim's wife Hazera Khatun filed a case with Ashulia Police Station accusing eight to 10 suspects.

When contacted, Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ashulia Police Station, told The Daily Star, "We have sent our forces to Dhamrai to arrest the suspected killers." He, however, declined to disclose their names.

The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Khaleda's green signal

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whether the party should participate in the election with herself in a special jail.

Delwar at a discussion meeting on Wednesday said a neutral and credible election is 'impossible under the present Election Commission (EC)', as it has lost neutrality by inviting 'so-called reformists' of the rival faction to electoral dialogues as representatives of BNP.

But leaders of Khaleda backed faction think they might end up contesting in the election under the present EC after all, if their faction is invited to the electoral dialogues and if they are allowed to have the sheaf of paddy as their electoral symbol, as the chairperson seems interested in her party's participation in the electoral process to restore democracy in the country.

"We will participate in the election with party's electoral symbol the sheaf of paddy," said a former law-maker of the party, who had been present at Khaleda's cantonment residence when the former premier had gone there on a short parole on January 19 to pay her last respect to her late mother.

Party leaders claimed Khaleda Zia talked to her lawyers about the cases filed against her, as well as party affairs. Later the lawyers conveyed her messages to the pro-Khaleda leaders.

But when asked, Rizvi Ahmed, acting office secretary of the faction, told The Daily Star yesterday, "The secretary general did not discuss the matter with us, so I am not clear on whether the chairperson gave any suggestion or not," although other party leaders said the chairperson suggested her senior leaders to work together asking them to take preparations to contest in the upcoming election.

She, however, expressed her

TV channels

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talk show Ekushey Somoy and Ekushey Raat.

Authorities imposed a ban on telecast of any sorts of talk show during the August violence last year. A few days later TV channels got permission to telecast talk shows on nine-point condition. But TV channels started to broadcast live talk shows frequently though the government suggested avoiding live talk shows.

Meanwhile, Channel 1 stopped audience question portion of its live talk show *Nirbachito Khobor*.

Information Secretary Jamil Osman yesterday told BBC that no media house has officially been given any such direction.

He however said the government advises them to maintain self-censorship during the state of emergency.

India, France agree

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The visit has seen defence ties high on the agenda, with France lobbying hard in a country ranked as the biggest weapons buyer among emerging nations and expected to spend an estimated 30 billion dollars on arms over the next five years.

French-Indian defence ties took a blow last month when New Delhi cancelled a Eurocopter bid for a 600-million-dollar (410-million-euro) helicopter contract due to alleged irregularities. The alleged payment of bribes in a submarine deal is also being probed.

France was the second largest arms supplier to India after Russia but has now been overtaken by Israel. The United States is also pushing for a place in the Indian market.

However, French firms are expected to be invited to upgrade India's fleet of Mirage fighters in a contract worth up to 1.5 billion euros -- and they are set to compete in a tender for 126 warplanes.

Sarkozy also announced progress on a nuclear cooperation agreement that has been in the works for years to allow France to supply equipment and fuel to India once it has cleared hurdles with the UN's nuclear watchdog.

A joint statement said "this agreement will form the basis of wide-ranging bilateral cooperation from

reservations about bringing back a few party leaders who had announced reform proposals for bringing changes to the party constitution in her absence, a former BNP lawmaker close to Delwar said.

Meanwhile, Delwar has been trying to communicate with leaders of different political parties to discuss ways for restoring democracy, pro-Khaleda leaders said.

On Thursday night, he had informal talks with Awami League (AL) leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan at an event hosted by Australian High Commission in Dhaka marking the national day of that country.

During his conversation with the AL leaders Delwar told them that his organisation is working to restore democracy in the country. In reply to which the AL leaders said they had 'started the struggle for democracy during BNP-Jamaat alliance government's regime, when there had been no democracy in the country'.

Gas supply

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branch of Titas Gas, told the journalists that the divers and engineers worked on the ruptured line for several hours on Thursday.

They could not continue the work at night due to unavailability of electricity. But it resumed at 8:00am yesterday, he added.

Titas Gas officials primarily found out that the pipeline went up in flames as the propeller of the vessel hit the pipeline, which goes 12 feet under water, damaging a portion of it. The damaged portion was measured at about six to eight inches in diameter.

Sources said Nayarhat-bound vessel MB Messrs Sharni Shipping Lines was heavily loaded with sand when it hit the pipeline.

The lower part of the vessel was also damaged and it got stranded after hitting the pipeline.

Police seized the vessel soon after the accident but released it yesterday. Savar police filed a general diary in this connection.

The Titas Gas authorities said they are thinking of filing a case.

A portion of the underwater gas pipeline on the bed of River Turag went up in flames at Aminabazar in Savar on Thursday as the lower part of the cargo vessel pierced through it.

The fire died down at around 1:00pm after the Titas Gas authorities turned off the supply of gas through the pipeline from Ashulia to Aminabazar.

Gas transmission in parts of the capital was disrupted following the accident.

The colossal force of gas coming out through the damaged portion of the pipeline hit the 1.33-lakh KV live electric wires running above the river. Restoration works of the damaged electric line are yet to begin.

Leaders worried

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and Europe has become a matter of concern for all.

Besides heads of government and ministers, bankers, economists and businessmen take part in the conference. In fact, they dominate the assembly and so do economic affairs.

Nobel Laureate and former US vice-president Al Gore and Irish rock star Bono however offered the audience a different taste by bringing up the issue of global climate change.

Gore said, "The countries are not taking appropriate measures to face the challenges of climate change and as a result, the situation is worsening."

Coming down hard on the rich countries, U2 frontman Bono said the G-8 countries are not making good on their pledges to support the developing world.

On the second day of the conference, Microsoft Corporation Chairman Bill Gates called for establishing "creative capitalism," saying "the world is getting better, but it's not getting better fast enough, and it's not getting better for everyone."

He observed, "There are roughly a billion people in the world who don't get enough food, who don't have clean drinking water, who don't have electricity, the things that we take for granted."

Diseases like malaria that kill over a million people a year get far less attention than drugs to help with baldness."

Gates called on the chief executives of the major commercial institutions to spend some of their talent, efforts and resources on the poorer segments of society.

Though President Pervez Musharraf hogged the limelight on the second day, economy returned to centre stage on the third day. There is however hardly any issue left out of the WEF agenda.

People from all walks of life come here, but not everyone stays for all five days. For example, the US foreign minister left as soon as her speech was over on the inaugural day. Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed was also scheduled to leave yesterday.

The entire Davos has been placed

Ijtema

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damaged in the rain forcing the pilgrims to collect more mats, while many of them collected polythene as an alternative since they were more cost effective. Some pilgrims were seen collecting sand from adjacent areas to spread over the muddy ground.

Most of the pilgrims could not reach their specific zones of stay on the ground due to stagnated water on the ground and muddy soil.

Many elderly pilgrims had to take shelter in various mosques and other places adjacent to the ijtema ground.

Kakrali Mosque Khatib also Sura Committee Member of Tablig Jamaat Moulaana Zohayer led the jum'a prayer.