

Musharraf's top advisers

FROM PAGE 16 fruitless. Some close friends of Perviz Musharraf were also in contact with the PPP leadership to reach a fresh deal, but the PPP never make any commitment to them. Hard-hitting language used by the PPP and the PML-Q candidates against each other during the election campaign widened the gap between the two parties.

In the meanwhile, the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif started new talks. They agreed to fight possible rigging jointly but had some difference of opinion on some issues. Now both the PPP and the PML-N have quietly agreed to ask for the resignation of President Musharraf after the elections. The two parties have also formulated a strategy about the restoration of judges but they will announce it if they win the election today.

Some top PPP sources have confirmed that they will not work with the PML-Q at any cost. According to these sources, President Perviz Musharraf never initiated any serious confidence-building measures with the party after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on December 27. The party was also not satisfied with investigation into BB's murder and then elections on January 8 were delayed against the wishes of the PPP. These sources said Musharraf assured them after the delay in election that there will be no rigging on February 18, but now the whole state machinery is in action to minimise the victory of the PPP.

There is a feeling in the party ranks that not only the Musharraf regime but also the Bush administration has cheated. Benazir Bhutto came to Pakistan last year when the Bush administration assured her of a free and fair election. Now after her assassination, the PPP sees no chance of a fair and free election under the nose of a very trusted US friend. The PPP leadership have completely lost their confidence in the Bush administration.

In a very short comment, PPP Co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari

said, "Enough is enough. Now we cannot trust the foreign friends of Musharraf". The PPP is more interested in briefing the Democratic congresspersons about the rigging in election today. Yesterday PPP leaders gave some documentary evidence of rigging to Democratic congresswoman Sheila Jackson and today they will meet another delegation of Democratic senators.

It is also learnt that President Musharraf indirectly contacted the PML-N leadership recently and tried to unite the two factions of the PML. But there was no breakthrough. PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif told this scribe that one close friend of Musharraf assured him that if they agree with his suggestion, then "you can trust us, we will hold free and fair election and after a few weeks President Musharraf will exit from the scene". Shehbaz Sharif said he was not ready to believe that Musharraf can leave his office so easily and that they never gave any serious consideration to that proposal.

Meanwhile, sources close to President Musharraf are confident that the PPP and the PML-N cannot work together for a long time and that they will start fighting with each other in a few months. They are sure that the PML-Q will get majority in Punjab and in that case the president will allow the PPP and the PML-N to form government in the centre. A trusted friend of Musharraf said, "PPP-PML-N coalition will not survive for more than six months; they will create a situation in which one of them will ultimately come to the President House for fresh elections".

Shehbaz Sharif said the PPP and the PML-N will not accept fake victory for the PML-Q in Punjab. He said, "We are sure that the presence of Musharraf in President Office will be a great source of instability in Pakistan and that is why we will try our level best to oust him immediately after the election with the help of the PPP".

Hamid Mir: Executive Editor, Geo TV, Pakistan
hamid.mir@geo.tv

MiG-29 case

FROM PAGE 16 Ahmed, former army chief Mustafizur Rahman, former defence secretary Syed Yusuf Hossain, Air Commodore (ret'd) Mirza Akhter Maruf, former joint secretary Mohammad Hossain Serniabat and Nur Ali, managing director of Unique Group.

Earlier on September 6 last year, the High Court (HC) vacated the stay order that another HC bench passed following seven separate writ petitions seeking quashment of the case. The HC order removed the legal bar to starting the proceedings of the case.

The case, filed against Hasina and four top defence officials with Tejaon Police Station, charged that the purchase of eight MiG-29 fighter jets during the Awami League government caused a loss of Tk 700 crore to the public exchequer.

The names of Brigadier General (ret'd) Iftekhar-Ul-Bashar and former deputy secretary Hasan Mahmood Delwar were dropped from the case for poor evidence while the former army chief, Air Commodore (ret'd) Mirza Akhter Maruf, former joint secretary Hossain Serniabat and businessman Nur Ali were implicated in the case after investigation found their involvement in the scam.

On December 11 in 2001, Inspector Abdullah Al Zahid at now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption submitted charge sheet to Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court of Dhaka, showing 40 persons as prosecution witnesses.

Following the charge sheet, all the accused, including Hasina, filed quashment petitions with the HC on different dates, securing stay on the case proceedings.

Hasina was arrested on July 16 last year following an extortion case filed by Azam J Chowdhury. The High Court threw out the case earlier this month.

Gram Sarker

FROM PAGE 16 certain observations "Policy Guideline, 2008 for Constructing Flat Houses on Government Land on the basis of Partnership".

Under the policy guideline, flat buildings will be built on the sites of reserved and abandoned houses and government lands on the basis of partnership with private entrepreneurs to accommodate government officers and employees.

In formulation of tender, publishing notice, and evaluation of proposals in all cases for appointing developers, the Public Procurement Regulation (PPR), 2003 will be followed," it is stated in the policy.

The constructed flats would be allocated to government officials and employees for 99 years on hire-purchase basis.

Presently, it is being possible to allocate government houses to less than 10 percent government officials and employees in Dhaka city.

Red tapes

FROM PAGE 16 public will suffer for their notion?"

Responding to the court, the attorney general told the 7-member full hierarchy of the Appellate Division that he would communicate the apex court's views to the government immediately.

After a brief hearing, the Supreme Court fixed Feb 20 as the deadline for the government to publish a gazette notification with regard to appointment of supporting staff, including UD clerks, for the district judicial magistracy.

Khaleda-backed

FROM PAGE 16 leaders to announce programmes for getting the party chairperson released.

"We have discussed the programmes to be observed to mark the international mother language day. We also talked about reorganising the city committee," Abu Sayeed Khan, vice president of the city committee, told the reporters after the meeting.

Delwar urged the BNP leaders to remain united under the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

He called upon them to make the programmes marking the mother language day a total success. The programmes include placing floral wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar on Thursday morning.

The party leaders will seek permission from the government for holding a discussion meeting on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Khaleda-backed acting BNP office secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday said they will not sit with the pro-Saifur faction if it does not cancel its decision made at a meeting on October 29.

He also accused the caretaker government of hatching a conspiracy to destroy BNP.

A conspiracy at national and international level is being hatched to destroy the party, he said at a press briefing at his Shyamoli residence.

Although the government failed to prove any of the charges brought against Khaleda Zia and her two sons, they are kept in jail, Rizvi added.

Hasina to consider

FROM PAGE 1 suggested the AL chief get admitted to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

Meanwhile in a press statement yesterday, 173 teachers of Dhaka University (DU) expressed grave concerns over the health of Sheikh Hasina and urged the government to ensure her proper treatment and release her immediately.

"Today, it is clear to all that the cases filed against her (Hasina) is politically motivated," said the statement sent by Prof Anwar Hossain of microbiology department, also the general secretary of DU Teachers' Association (Duta).

It was signed by Dr Harun-or-Rashid, Dr Mohammad Anwar Hossain, Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique, Dr Mizanur Rahman, Dr Muhammad Samad, Prof RIM Aminur Rashid, Dr Mohammad Rahmat Ullah, Dr Mohammad Afzal Hossain, Mahbuba Nasreen, among others.

Meanwhile, Hasina's only son Sajeeb Wazed Joy yesterday urged the government to allow her mother to go to US for medical treatment.

Talking to New York based-America News Agency (ANA), Joy said the government would have to shoulder the responsibility if anything happens to her mother for not receiving proper treatment.

She needs to have some important medical tests now including test of liver and kidney functions, ECG, chest x-ray and lipid profile for blood pressure observation, he said.

"It would be better if she is admitted to a hospital. Then we could keep her under observation for at least a couple of days," Dr Abdullah said adding that he had

3 JMB men

FROM PAGE 1 verdict. Yunus was tried in absentia as he is on the run. The court acquitted Fahima alias Farzana, also known as Rokeya, as her involvement with the killings was not proved.

Judge AHM Mustaque Ahmed of the Speedy Trial Tribunal delivered the verdict.

The court did not consider punishing JMB's second-in-command Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai and JMB's military commander Aatur Rahman Sunny as their death penalty for killing two Jhalakathi judges were earlier executed.

The prosecution and the defence completed their arguments earlier and the court recorded statements of 29 prosecution witnesses during the trial.

According to the prosecution, on December 6, 2005, the convicts made plans for the suicide bomb attacks during a meeting held secretly at Nagora, a house belonging to Khorsheed Master, at Acua in Mymensingh town.

As per their plan, suicide bomb attacks were carried out at Udichi and Shata Dal Shilpi Goshthi offices around 10:30am on December 8, 2005 that left eight people dead and 40 others injured. One Arian alias Kafi made the explosives used to bomb the cultural organisations.

The victims of the blasts are Khawja Haider, Sudipta Paul Shelly, Rani Begum, Joinal, Raisuddin, Yadev Das, Jahanara and Shawkat.

Our Netrakona correspondent reports that after hearing the verdict, victims' family members expressed their satisfaction over it and appealed to the government for quick execution of the verdict.

ACC to quiz

FROM PAGE 1 along with former law minister Moudud Ahmed, former state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain after the IO of the case filed a petition.

All three had been arrested earlier in other cases.

ACC Assistant Director Mahbubul Alam filed the case against Khaleda Zia and four others on December 9 stating that although Khaleda Zia had been the custodian of the country's wealth as the prime minister, she awarded Niko an opportunity to extract gas worth Tk10,000 crore, criminally violating her oath, abusing her power, and through corruption.

The ACC also accused former energy secretary Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, former acting energy secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam, and Kashem Sharif -- vice-president (South Asia) of Niko Research Bangladesh Ltd -- in the case.

Former Dhaka Club president Selim Bhuiyan, also arrested in connection with the case, confessed in a statement on January 15 that all dealings between Bangladesh government and the Canadian energy company had been made through him.

On the basis of Selim's confessional statement, detained businessman Giassuddin Al Mamun was shown arrested in the same case. The ACC earlier obtained permission to interrogate him at the jail gate.

The Niko graft case, in which Khaleda Zia and five others were implicated, was filed with Tejaon Police Station on December 9 on charge that awarding the gas exploration deal to the Canadian company caused huge loss to the state.

The plaintiff said the other accused were complicit in the illegal deal.

Khaleda was arrested on Sept 2 last year after Gato graft case was filed against her.

suggested the AL chief get admitted to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

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Edible oil

FROM PAGE 1 However, the prices of branded edible oil remained unchanged in city markets due to strict monitoring of law enforcement agencies, traders said.

Since February 6 this year till date, Soybean oil prices saw an increase of around Tk 14 on an average at both retail and wholesale markets.

Owner of a small restaurant at Tejaon in the city said he had bought soybean oil at Tk 99 a kg on Friday, but on Sunday he had to buy the same at Tk 108 per kg from Karwan Bazar wholesale market.

Speaking with The Daily Star, traders at the city's Moulvibazar wholesale market blamed the recent price increase on the artificial crisis created by a cartel of middlemen and oil refiners.

The unscrupulous middlemen, mostly known as DO traders, buy up large quantities of oil from oil refineries with advance payments and receive demand orders (DO) from the refineries. The refiners at this stage take the opportunity to jack up the price of oil, said sources at the wholesale market.

The DO traders, with the connivance of brokers, then spread false rumours of price increase on international market or supply shortfall at local oil refineries. Being convinced, the wholesalers agree to buy the oil or DOs at higher prices from the DO traders through the brokers, added the sources.

"As a result, within a short span of time, the prices of edible oil went up unusually," said a trader at the Moulvibazar wholesale market requesting anonymity.

Medical equipment

FROM PAGE 16 A piece of equipment like Analyzer Blood Gas worth over Tk 1 crore, procured for the pathology department more than a year ago, remains unused since the hospital does not have the costly chemicals, worth around Tk 80 lakh, it requires to operate.

Seven other modern and valuable pieces of equipment of the pathology department have been lying around at the hospital veranda due to the importing contractors' unwillingness to install them, technical issues and in one case, failure of Central Medical Stores Depot (CMSD) in getting clearance from the Atomic Energy Commission regarding the installation of equipment, sources said.

Hospital administration sources said they have workable and idle equipment worth Tk 60.70 crore. Many of them were provided by the CMSD while a few were purchased.

The CMSD supplied the Analyzer Blood Gas and a number of other equipment for the pathology department, Jostra Heart Lung Machine and Jostra Heart Exchanger for the cardiac surgery department (yet to be set up). Jostra Heart Lung Machine and Jostra Heart Exchanger have not been installed due to unavailability of technicians to install them.

However, the psychotherapy department is not working properly due to shortage of manpower even though it has plenty of equipment. On the contrary, there is no cardiac surgery department but there is equipment for it.

Golam Mustafa said due to some structural faults in the building and delays at different government offices most machines are lying idle in their packaged condition.

After inauguration of the Tk 223-crore project on August 31, 2006, the hospital authorities requested, in good time, the health ministry as well as the health adviser during last one year to take initiative and install the machines. They are yet to respond, sources said.

Bibiyan power

FROM PAGE 16 shortcomings in its bid document. The Power Cell ultimately disqualified Summit, leaving the number of pre-qualified to only four in the beginning," the source added.

Another interested bidder, YTL Power of Malaysia was similarly disqualified because of minor shortcomings.

Keppo in its February 11 letter pointed out that it will withdraw as a pre-qualified bidder once the Power Cell approves its admission to the Consortium. It noted that the new consortium will comply with the financial and technical criteria of the pre-qualification document.

Powertek on February 13 wrote a similar letter. It noted, "There will be no change to the Lead Member and the Operating Member and the PB [Pre-qualified Bidder] will remain as the Lead Member and the Operating Member of the Reconstituted Consortium."

The PB will have 51 percent participating interests in the consortium.

Meanwhile, the Power Cell held pre-bid meetings with the pre-qualified bidders on February 12-13.

AEs, Powertek, Keppo and Chevron attended the meeting that was led by representatives of the bid's consultant IFC along with the director general of the Power Cell.

Hasina verdict

FROM PAGE 16 Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on February 12 directed the government to file civil petition for leave to appeal by tomorrow (February 19) along with the certified copy of the High Court judgment.

Sources in the Attorney General's Office, however, could not confirm whether they would be able to file the regular appeal by tomorrow.

Additional Attorney General Salahuddin Ahmad yesterday told The Daily Star, "We got the certified copy of the judgment and are trying to file the leave to appeal as soon as possible."

The High Court bench of Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman and Justice Shahidul Islam on February 6 quashed the extortion case filed by businessman Azam J Chowdhury last year against Awami League chief Hasina and declared bringing of the case under Emergency Power Rules illegal.

Within an hour of the verdict delivery, the government filed a provisional leave petition with the Supreme Court seeking stay on the High Court verdict. After hearing on the petition, a Supreme Court bench on February 12 without disposing the petition asked the government to file a regular leave petition by February 19.

The hearing on charge framing in the Tk 3 crore barge-mount graft case filed against Hasina and seven others is scheduled to be held tomorrow at 2:30pm in a special court set up at the MP Hostel on the Jatuya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

Firoz Alam, judge of Special Court-1, on February 13 deferred the hearing on charge framing as detained Hasina was not produced before the court due to illness.

Judge Firoz is expected to pass his order tomorrow regarding Hasina's petition submitted on Wednesday seeking bail in the graft case as the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments on it.

Shajahan Siraj

FROM PAGE 16 Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court passed the order and directed the authorities concerned to send the copies of arrest warrants to the respective addresses of the accused.

SIRAJ ACC Assistant Director SM Sahidur Rahman, IO of the case, submitted the charge sheet against Shajahan Siraj and his wife before the CMM's Court on February 14, showing 41 people as prosecution witnesses.

The IO asked for arrest warrants against the couple and attachment of their properties.

ACC Assistant Director Khairul Huda filed the case against the former minister and his wife with Ramna police station on September 24 last year.

They were accused of concealing Tk 3.60 crore in their wealth statements submitted earlier to the ACC. They have allegedly also amassed a wealth of Tk 3.75 crore beyond their known sources of income.

Earlier, the Siraj couple were convicted of evading income tax in a different case and sentenced to different terms of punishment. They have been absconding since the first case was filed against them.

ACC Deputy Director Akhter Hossain filed the case against the Mokbul couple on August 16 last year with Mohammadpur Police Station in connection with amassing a wealth of Tk 1.92 crore through illegal means.

Kosovo declares

FROM PAGE 16 "Whatever happens in Pristina tonight it will not be the end of a part of our history, but just the beginning," said the influential Politika newspaper, summing up the mood in Belgrade.

Independence would bring down the curtain on the long and brutal break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s that followed the demise of communism in Europe and witnessed the continent's worst atrocities since World War II.

About 10,000 people died in the 1998-1999 war as Serb forces tried to put down ethnic Albanian separatists. A NATO air war against late Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic halted the conflict and Kosovo has since been under UN administration.

"We've been waiting for this day for such a long time," said Sherife Bajrami, a Pristina doctor and mother of four. "We'll celebrate with dignity, with respect for minorities, for all to live happily in the land of Kosovo."

The declaration started a 120-day transition period and the deployment of a 2,000-strong European Union police and judicial team to help the transition.

A constitution -- based on a blueprint for "supervised independence" proposed by UN special envoy Martti Ahtisaari that Serbia refused to accept -- would come later.

Russia blocked the Ahtisaari plan at the United Nations and Kosovo's independence declaration will be made without UN Security Council approval, despite its backing by Western powers.

The United States on Sunday reaffirmed its strong backing for an independent Kosovo.

"On Kosovo, our position is that its status must be resolved in order for the Balkans to be stable," US President George W. Bush said.

With an estimated 40 percent unemployment, and half its population under the age of 25, Kosovo will nevertheless remain highly dependent on massive infusions of Western economic aid.

Many of its neighbours fear its independence will unsettle a region still rife with inter-ethnic tension more than a decade after the end of the Balkan wars.

Within the EU, countries such as Greece, Romania and Bulgaria which are close to Serbia, or which like Spain and Cyprus have their own separatist problems, have said they would not recognise Kosovo.

Serbia has vowed to oppose the EU police mission. Deputy Prime Minister Bozidar Djelic said in a formal protest to Brussels that only the UN Security Council could rule on Kosovo's status.

CEC criticises

FROM PAGE 16 say anything about planned changes to the draft electoral reform proposals based on the first round of dialogue with political parties.

He said the commission has yet to take decision about the changes. The matter would be finalised today.

"We'll share the proposed changes with you [media] before sending out the invitation letters," he added.

Queried if the EC would start inviting political parties on February 19 for the second round of dialogue, Huda answered in the affirmative.

The commission will begin the second-round dialogue on February 24.

Pak election

FROM PAGE 1 several key judges last year to pave the way for a second presidential term, faces impeachment if the opposition wins more than two-thirds of parliament.

Opinion polls have suggested that, if the polls are free and fair, Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party stands to win a majority and the party of former premier Nawaz Sharif will come second, while the PML-Q trails behind.

The man widely seen as Musharraf's choice for prime minister -- Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi of the PML-Q -- told AFP the charges of rigging were "frivolous... we are going to win the election tomorrow".

Police in southern Pakistan said they had arrested a man carrying some 500 ballot papers on Sunday. The man was believed to be a PML-Q supporter but officials were seeking confirmation, police officer Mohammad Ali Gadehi said.

Bhutto's widow, Asif Ali Zardari, warned in an interview with Britain's Sunday Times newspaper that he would have "no choice" but to call for protests if the polls were fraudulent.

"If the elections are rigged the situation will go out of my hands. We'll have no choice but to take to the streets," he said.

Separately Sharif said an alleged recording of the attorney general saying the polls would be fixed showed that free elections were impossible. The attorney general has denied making the comments.

"I think it is more than clear that a massive rigging plan is in place. It has been implemented," Sharif told reporters in Lahore.

Pakistan's chief election commissioner, Qazi Farooq, pledged in

Russia -- Serbia's closest partner on the global stage, and mindful that Kosovo's independence might set a precedent in restive corners of its vast territory -- is certain to block such moves.

An estimated 120,000 Serbs live in Kosovo, which is home to some of the most important shrines of the Serbian Orthodox faith. More than 220,000 others have left since 1999.

Belgrade is imploring Serbs in Kosovo to stay put as an act of defiance -- a message echoed Saturday by the pretender to the long-abolished Serbian throne, Crown Prince Aleksandar II.

"The most important thing for you is to stay here and remain calm," he told a Serb crowd in the divided town of Kosovska Mitrovica, where he attended Orthodox mass.

"Wisdom, calm, along with law and order are our only weapons. You must not forget that."

Afghan

FROM PAGE 16 "Fighting had just started between two dogs. Suddenly I heard a huge explosion next to a police vehicle. Then I saw lots of people dead and wounded. I counted over 40 people on the ground dead," he told AFP.

Police reinforcements rushed to the scene as civilian and police cars and ambulances ferried the wounded to hospitals. A police officer who asked not to be identified said he had helped to evacuate more than 50 dead and wounded.

Witnesses said the attack bore the hallmarks of previous suicide bombings carried out by Taliban insurgents.

A spokesman for the group, Yousuf Ahmadi, said he could not yet comment on the blast.

Wali Karzai, the brother of President Hamid Karzai and head of the Kandahar provincial council, told AFP he had no doubt the attack had been carried out by the extremist movement.

"Who else would carry out suicide bombings? Obviously the Taliban are the ones carrying out suicide attacks," he said.

The blast was the biggest ever in Kandahar city, he added.

The Taliban, which rose from Kandahar province in the early 1990s, last year carried out around 140 suicide attacks across Afghanistan.

Kandahar city had seen a wave of suicide blasts and other attacks but the strikes lasted off last year.

The last significant attack in the city was in December when a suicide attacker blew up a bomb-filled car near an Afghan army convoy, killing a civilian.

A US aid worker was kidnapped in the city three weeks ago with her driver. No group has publicly admitted to the abduction including the Taliban, who captured dozens of foreigners and Afghans last year, killing some of them.

The last major attack on a crowd gathered for entertainment was in January 2006 when a suicide bomber on a motorcycle blew himself up among men watching a wrestling match in the border town of Spin Boldak near Kandahar.

About 24 people were killed.

Nato-led and US military forces helping the government tackle the violence have been calling for reinforcements ahead of an expected surge in fighting as the weather warms in coming weeks.

Last year was the worst of the Taliban insurgency, with more than 6,000 people killed.

a televised address that the process would be "free and fair and transparent", while authorities warned of a crackdown