

Pak lawmakers to elect new PM Monday

Yousuf Raza Gilani current frontrunner

AFP, DAILY TIMES, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf yesterday summoned Pakistan's new parliament to convene on March 24 to elect a prime minister, his spokesman told AFP.

The new National Assembly, met for the first time this week after elections last month in which the parties of former premiers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif trounced Musharraf's allies.

"The president has been pleased to summon the National Assembly on Monday at 4:00pm for ascertaining of the member who commands the confidence of the majority of members of the assembly," Musharraf's spokesman Major General Rashid Qureshi told the news agency.

According to Daily Times, Pakistani People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will announce the party's premiership candidate at an "appropriate time", PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar said on Wednesday.

Bilawal, the 19-year-old son of Benazir Bhutto who is studying at Britain's prestigious Oxford University, was named Benazir's heir following her assassination at a political rally on December 27. The untested Bilawal is completing his studies, and his father, Asif Ali Zardari, has taken the reins of the PPP which won the most seats in last month's parliamentary elections.

Bilawal will announce the name of the prime minister. He has come to Pakistan, he is in Karachi," Babar said.

He said the PPP would announce its candidate only after the National Assembly was reconvened to elect the head of the next government.

Party insiders have said that the current frontrunner for the position is Yousuf Raza Gilani, a long-term PPP loyalist who was parliamentary speaker during Benazir's government from 1993-1996. They said that the premier named by Bilawal might only hold the post for a few months, until Zardari becomes eligible for the post after contesting by-elections.

Meanwhile, political parties pledged to restore the supremacy of parliament in speeches following the election of Speaker Fehmida Mirza at the National Assembly session on Wednesday.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

Niko case

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Hasina on March 13 refused to receive a letter sent to her by the investigation officer (IO) of the case, ACC's SM Sabir Hasan, without consulting her lawyers. The letter gave her five days to give statement on her defence, sources said.

Sources in the ACC said the report recommended two mid-level officers from Petrobangla and Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (Bapex) be added to the list of accused in the case. Their names were not disclosed.

"As far as I know Sheikh Hasina has not replied to the ACC letter asking for her statement," ACC Director General (admin) Hanif Iqbal said during a routine press briefing yesterday.

The ACC has also issued similar letters to other accused in the case.

Four of the accused have already submitted statements in their defence, the IO said adding that Rafiqul Islam and Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury asked for more time but their pleas were rejected.

The accused who submitted statements are former principal secretary to the Prime Minister's Office SA Samad, former energy secretary MAkmal Hossain, former Petrobangla chairman Mosharraf Hossain and Vice-president (South Asia) of Niko Kashem Sharif.

ACC Deputy Director Sabir Hasan filed the case on December 9 last year with Tejgaon Police Station accusing them of causing a loss of over Tk 13,630 crore to the public exchequer by initiating a gas exploration deal with Canadian company Niko Resources Ltd.

Prof Wahiduddin

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ment to introduce ration cards for people of low income in urban areas," he said.

Wahiduddin Mahmud, former adviser to the caretaker government in 1996, also said it is necessary to put a 'moral pressure' on business to bring down the prices of essential items and prevent them from making high profit.

Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said the committee will sit again tomorrow to discuss the current status of market prices.

"We are making all-out efforts to bring down the prices of essential commodities and we are getting positive results in some cases," he said.

He said the price of per litre soya bean oil came down to Tk 107-108 from Tk 120 as the government withdrew all types of duties on import of edible oil.

CEC

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missed national identity card, then he/she would have to face many hurdles in the future.

Presided over by Rajbari Deputy Commissioner Mahfuzur Rahman, the meeting was also addressed, among others, by Brig Gen Shah Atiqur Rahman, Acting Police Superintendent Mahfuzur Rahman, District Election Officer Rakib Uddin Mondal, Goalanda Upazila Nirbahi Officer M Moniruzzaman and elected local representatives and civil society members.

Miladunnabi

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shrines and other institutions on the occasion.

Political parties will organise indoor discussion and milad due to restrictions imposed under the state of emergency.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Farquhar Ahmed in separate messages greeted the countrymen on the occasion of Miladunnabi.

The president said, "Islam, preached by Hazrat Muhammad (SM) is the best ideology for overall welfare of mankind. The Ideology he left for the welfare of mankind, along with preaching the monotheism of Allah, has been encouraging people of the world into the path of truth and beauty for ages."

In his message, the chief adviser said Hazrat Muhammad (SM) played a pioneering role in establishing peace, harmony, equity, fraternity and humanity in the world.

He also called upon the countrymen to devote themselves to the process of building an enlightened society based on justice through pursuing the ideals and lessons of prophet (SM) at every stage of their lives.

Both the president and the chief adviser wished the people of Bangladesh and the Muslim world peace, progress and welfare.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will air special programmes on the occasion. Besides, newspapers will publish special articles on the occasion.

US for lifting

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The US statement followed the release of its annual report "Human Rights Practices 2007" where it stated that human rights record worsened in Bangladesh under the protracted state of emergency.

The report said both former prime ministers Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia were denied fair public trial and the government used Emergency Power Rules to curtail freedoms of speech and the press.

The report stated that individuals were not able to publicly criticise the government without fear of reprisal, indoor and outdoor political gatherings remained suspended, and legal action was taken against critical editors and journalists.

The five-minute audio message, titled "May Our Mothers Be Bereaved Of Us If We Fail To Help Our Prophet," was posted by As-Sabah, Al-Qaeda's media arm, according to SITE Intelligence Group.

The message coincided with the fifth anniversary of the Iraq War.

The audio track with English subtitles is heard over a video image of bin Laden holding an AK-47 assault rifle.

IntellCenter chief Ben Venzke said bin Laden's message was "a clear threat against EU member countries and an indicator of a possible upcoming significant attack."

"However, it is unclear in exactly what timeframe it may occur," he said.

ACC to launch

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Replies to another query, Hanif told the journalists that a deputy director of the ACC is assigned to investigate corruption allegations at Bangladesh Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Different officials of the embassy have already been served with letters asking them to explain their position regarding their alleged involvement in corruption.

The investigation is being conducted based on primary inquiry report and it will take another month to give specific details on the issue," Hanif added.

Misuse of government property, causing loss to the exchequer through abuse of power and misappropriation of money are some of the allegations against the embassy, he said.

Replies to a question regarding the names of accused proposed in the investigation report of Niko graft case against former premier and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, Hanif said. "The names cannot be disclosed until the report is finalised after proper examination."

CHARGESHEETS

The ACC yesterday approved charge sheet against former lawmaker Anwar Hossain Manju and his wife Tasnim Hossain for concealing information about wealth worth over Tk 4.15 crore and amassing of wealth worth over Tk 14.93 crore beyond their known sources of income.

The second charge sheet the ACC approved was against Dr Firoz Mahmud Iqbal and his wife Imtiyaz Begum for accumulating wealth worth over Tk 1.73 crore.

The other charge sheet the ACC approved yesterday was against MA Quayum and his wife Shamim Ara for concealing wealth worth over Tk 5.98 lakh and amassing illegal wealth worth over Tk 7.20 crore beyond their known sources of income.

After that it will be sent to the law ministry for vetting and returned to the council of advisers for final approval. The president will then promulgate the ordinances, sources said.

AL plans street protests

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views. They will also seek opinions of metropolitan, district and upazila unit leaders before announcing the programmes on a limited scale.

Besides, there would be meetings with representatives from different front organisations to give them necessary directions.

AL Publicity Secretary Asaduzzaman Noor, who attended yesterday's meeting, told The Daily Star, "We are a people's political party, so if we don't talk about their crises then why they would depend on us."

"We want measures to alleviate public sufferings as early as possible."

Meanwhile, yesterday's meeting decided it will soon form a committee dedicated to maintaining discipline within the party. The organisation and its wings have lately been badly affected due to internal disorder, according to the party insiders.

The meeting also decided that the AL will not make its position clear about the local body elections until the government arranges for those.

It also reiterated its call for the government to free Hasina immediately and send her to the US for treatment.

The meeting decided to boycott the president's programme on the Independence Day protesting invitation to the war criminals and anti-Liberation War forces there.

BRIEFING

Briefing journalists after the meeting, Syed Ashrafuddin Islam said, "We are strongly urging the

Coarse rice

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Tk 1,230 the previous day.

Prices of local coarse rice also increased by Tk 10 per maund and it was selling between Tk 1,130 and Tk 1,200 yesterday. It, however, did not affect the retail markets.

Different varieties of coarse rice were selling between Tk 32 and Tk 35 a kg in retail markets yesterday.

Meanwhile, shops run by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Open Market Sale (OMS) outlets experienced a huge rush of consumers during the last couple of days due to price hike of rice in kitchen markets.

Abdur Rahman, an official of a private firm in Tejgaon, said, "I have never been to the fair-price shops but now I have no other way. The price hike of rice forced me to come here."

The prices of palm, super palm and soya bean oil dropped to Tk 15, Tk 95 and Tk 100 a kg in the wholesale markets yesterday. It had no effect on the retail markets.

One kg of non-brand soya bean oil was selling between Tk 106 and Tk 108 at the retail markets yesterday. It was selling between Tk 120 and Tk 130 nine days ago.

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Billboards

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the rooftop billboards, the owners will write with the High Court. Now we can't do anything against them although there is a ban imposed in 2005 on rooftop billboards.

"We've already warned all the owners of the buildings on which the billboards are installed, but they also could not remove those due to the stay," he said.

"DCC has assigned a barrister to move in the High Court and we are hopeful that the court would deliver verdict in our favour," he said.

Sources say the Outdoor Advertising Owners' Association (OAOA) filed two writs -- one against DCC and the other against Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakka (Rajuk) -- in 2006 against the move to demolish rooftop billboards.

OAOA general secretary Mohammad Rashed claimed billboard collapse did not kill the youth on Wednesday night. The youth was killed when a piece of iron fell on him, he told The Daily Star.

Rashed, also owner of ad firm Century Art, said, "When a lot of people are getting killed in various accidents including road, river and even building collapse, a few deaths due to billboard collapse are not something exceptional."

During a visit to the Chandrima Super Market yesterday, it was seen that the three-storey building houses also a mosque with several billboards on rooftop.

Besides, a huge quantity of iron rods, bars and several pieces of tin of damaged billboards was also found dumped on top of the building.

Manjurul Karim who identified him as an office assistant of the building said, "Cyclone Sidr damaged the billboards installed on the building top, while a city corporation drive also knocked down a few."

Asked if such commission would be an impediment to normal judicial system, the law adviser yesterday said, "There will be no such scope."

The draft ordinances for the "Accountability Commission" and the National Security Council will be placed before the council of advisers for approval in principle.

The security guard of the building said the youth was killed when a piece of billboard fell on him as he was standing between Chandrima Super Market and New Market.

Motahar Ali, assistant sub-inspector of New Market Police

Love for birds

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what to do," said Tapan.

"I picked up two birds and found they were alive. So, I took them to the dorm," he added.

"I called my friends Aniruddha and Palash and consulted with them what to do. And we decided to help them," he said.

Tapan, Aniruddha, Palash and Viki took all the wounded birds to their dormitory.

The students, who do not have any formal knowledge of taking care of sick birds, just used common sense.

They made a fire burning newspapers to make the wet birds warmer. They fed them with water and cooked rice.

Later Dipendu, a student of zoology, joined them and phoned his classmate Arnab from Fazlul Haq Hall.

"We have been taking care of the birds since Wednesday night," Dipendu said while feeding cooked fish and water to a sick bird yesterday afternoon.

"We were amazed in the morning," Arnab said. "We found all the birds were now able to stand up. The corridor of the hall looked like a poultry farm," he said.

Dr Anawarul Islam, a wildlife expert and teacher of zoology, visited the hall to see his students' activities.

"These birds live on the top branches of trees. Many take shelter in the large trees around Jagannath Hall. So, many birds were affected by the storm," Prof Anawar said.

The students have so far cured 140 kites. Only six birds were still unable to fly, but the students were trying hard to cure them.

Nam flats

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Daily Star yesterday.

He, however, could not say immediately how the parliament secretariat would respond to it. His office did not respond to several previous letters that asked for cancelling the ex-lawmakers' allotment to pave the way for realising revised rent after fresh allotment, said officials.

Contacted last night for his comments, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar suggested contacting the parliament secretariat.

Yesterday's letter came after the Chief Adviser's Office had asked the ministry on Sunday to implement the government decision on realising new charges for Nam flats from January, which was not being implemented as the parliament secretariat did not cancel the allotments to the resident former lawmakers by the timeline.

The ministry sent a letter in this regard on December 4, which also asked the former MPs to pay Tk 20,000 a month for