

# 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 ascertainment 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, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will announce the party's premier-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 parliament 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

FROM PAGE 16

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 M Akmal 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 Teigaon 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

FROM PAGE 16

Wahiduddin Mahmud, former adviser to the caretaker government in 1996, also said it is necessary to put a 'moral pressure' on businessmen 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

FROM PAGE 1

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.

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.

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## AL plans street protests

FROM PAGE 1

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.

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caretaker government to consider our demand for steps to send our leader (Hasina) to the US for treatment.

"They must not delay when the specialist doctors have already said treatment of her ears is not possible here."

The country has been going through a very critical time as, the AL leader said, food price inflation has gone up by 70 to 80 percent. He urged the government to take immediate steps to bring the prices within people's reach.

Syed Ashraf said both the caretaker government and the EC have been making contradictory statements over the national and local government elections. He asked them to "stop talking and go for the parliamentary polls first".

The acting AL general secretary demanded that the government withdraw the curb on trade union. If the right to organise is not given back, the country's image as one of the signatories to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention would be tarnished, he observed.

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## Love for birds

FROM PAGE 16

what to do," said Tapan.

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

"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 Anwarul 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 Anwar 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.

## Atiqullah Khan

FROM PAGE 16

premises, delivered the verdict.

Atiqullah Khan was jailed for seven years each in two other cases on same charges on March 6 and 9.

ACC Deputy Assistant Director Mahmud Hasan filed the case against three persons on September 30, 2007.

Later, the name of Sohrab Miah, building inspector of Rajuk, was dropped from the charge sheet.

According to case statement, Atiqullah submitted a building design to Rajuk for constructing a 15-storey building in the capital's Segunbagicha.

Instead of getting the design approved by the authorised Rajuk committee, Kamruzzaman and Sohrab prepared fake documents saying that Rajuk had approved the building design.

Atiqullah Khan benefited Tk 8.70 crore through it.

Joint forces arrested Atiqullah Masud at Janakantha building in the capital's Eskaton on March 7 last year. He has been in custody since then.

Kamruzzaman, who has been absconding, was tried in absentia.

## SC Bar chief

FROM PAGE 16

of the judiciary," Amir told an emergency meeting of the association.

The SCBA president said the constitution does not provide any such provision for the chief justice to control the court in the name of reconstitution of the benches.

The emergency meeting was convened in the wake of dissolving Justice Nayeem's writ bench on March 17.

Barrister Amir said the chief justice has discretionary power under the constitution to reconstitute benches. The usual practice is that benches are reconstituted once a year or after a long vacation, he observed.

But, he said, it is immoral to break any bench in the middle of a week. He said the SCBA has long been pressing for setting rules how to constitute and reconstitute a bench instead of doing it by the chief justice unilaterally for the sake of proper dispensation of justice.

Barrister Amir said this unilateral action does not resolve the problems of the litigants and the justice seekers. Rather, efficient judges who have expertise in motion and writ jurisdiction were kept engaged in other benches.

Ahmed Azam said the BNP chairperson is concerned over price hike of essentials and termed it a "great crisis" for the nation.

The family counsel of Khaleda Zia said she urged the caretaker government to send abroad her two detained sons for treatment.

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