

Fear of sodomy charge against Anwar Ibrahim

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's opposition figurehead Anwar Ibrahim insisted yesterday he would fight a by-election later this year and form a new government despite fears he will soon be charged with sodomy.

"There are thousands of criminal cases not properly investigated. Why pursue this with zeal and in an unjust way? Is it because I will participate in a by-election, Anwar told reporters.

"You want me to withdraw? No. I will continue to pursue the change. Let's see if they want to charge me," he said after being interviewed by Islamic sharia enforcement officials over the sodomy allegations.

The former deputy prime minister admitted that his family and friends will undergo the same suffering they experienced in 1998 if he is "victimised, arrested and jailed."

Anwar has said the allegations of a young male aide, a repeat of charges that saw him jailed a decade ago, have been fabricated to block his plans to topple the coalition that has ruled Malaysia for half a century.

He has demanded that police stop the investigation and called the aide, 23-year-old Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, an "outright liar" who was working with others in power to frame him.

Police, however, have said they will continue sodomy investigations on Anwar despite a leaked medical report which he said had vindicated him as it showed no evidence that his accuser was sodomised.

Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said the medical report was part of a whole chain of evidence which police were investigating, the Star daily reported.

Meanwhile the medical report, cited by Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, which said no assault had taken place in a sodomy case appears genuine, according to a senior hospital official.

"It looks genuine," the private hospital's medical director Kamaruddin Ahmad told reporters Wednesday.

The June 28 report has also been circulating on political websites. It showed there was no evidence that his accuser, Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, had been sodomised.

Sodomy is punishable by up to 20 years imprisonment in mostly Muslim Malaysia.

Anwar, a former deputy premier who was sacked in 1998 before being jailed on sodomy and corruption charges, has said he plans to return to parliament later this year if a court orders a by-election near his home town.



Malaysia opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim (L) walks with his wife Wan Azizah (R) as they leave the Islamic Shariah Court and Enforcement office in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Malaysia's opposition figurehead Anwar Ibrahim said he will contest in the by election later this year and form a new government despite fears that he may be charged for sodomy.

25 killed in fresh Lanka Fighting

AFP, Colombo

Twenty-one Tamil rebels and four government troops were killed in fresh fighting in Sri Lanka's embattled north as the nation readied to host a summit of regional leaders, officials said yesterday.

The palm-fringed island will be the venue for the two-day summit of leaders of the 15th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which opens Saturday.

Defence ministry officials said 21 separatist Tamil Tiger guerrillas were killed in clashes Tuesday in the northern Wanni region 250 kilometres (160 miles) north of the capital.

Four soldiers also died, officials said, adding that fighting raged in the north where troops were advancing into territory held by the guerrillas.

The government last month rejected a rebel offer for a brief unilateral ceasefire for the summit and has kept up military raids on insurgent positions.

The report of new deaths came as officials of the eight-nation South Asian grouping were in the second day of talks to lay the ground for the summit that will focus on trade and terrorism.

The officials will meet Thursday to review the agenda for their leaders.

The leaders of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will attend.

India claims Pak shooting on Kashmir frontier again

AFP, AP, Srinagar

India's army yesterday accused Pakistani troops of again breaking a ceasefire along the de facto border dividing disputed Kashmir by opening fire on Indian positions.

The report of renewed firing -- denied by Pakistan -- came a day after the nuclear-armed rivals traded blame for an earlier shooting incident along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Himalayan region that left an Indian soldier dead.

"The Pakistani troops have again violated the ceasefire by opening fresh fire," army spokesman Anil Kumar Mathur told AFP.

The firing was reported in the Nowgam sector, north of Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar -- the same area where India said the two armies traded fire for nearly 14 hours from late Monday into early Tuesday.

"We have again lodged a protest with Pakistan through our military hotline," Mathur said, adding that Indian troops "exercised restraint and did not retaliate."

He called it a "brief spurt of firing" and said there were no casualties.

In Islamabad, chief Pakistani military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas denied the Indian claims, telling AFP: "There is no report of firing from any part of the Line of Control by Pakistani troops."

"Our troops did not violate the ceasefire."

Indian and Pakistani soldiers traded gunfire for more than 12 hours between Monday night and Tuesday morning, the worst violation of a 2003 cease-fire agreement between the nuclear-armed neighbors. One Indian soldier and four Pakistanis were killed in that incident.

While there have been an

increase of border area incidents in recent months, relations between India and Pakistan have improved considerably since the start of a peace process in 2004. No one suggests that the recent frontier shootings seriously threaten those talks.

But progress has been slow, and deep distrust remains between the nuclear-armed neighbors with New Delhi regularly blaming Islamabad for bombings and shootings that have plagued India in recent years.

On Tuesday, Pakistan's military rejected Indian charges of a "serious violation" of the 2003 ceasefire, saying Indian troops had crossed the LoC late Monday and opened fire.

Tensions have been heightened between the South Asian rivals since a suicide bombing outside the Indian embassy in Kabul earlier this month, which Afghanistan and India have blamed on "elements" in Pakistan.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over mainly Muslim Kashmir, held in part by each country but claimed in full by both.

In 2002, they came to the brink of war, massing troops along their de facto border, in the wake of an attack on the Indian parliament that New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based rebel groups fighting its rule in Kashmir.

They agreed to a ceasefire along the LoC in 2003 and launched a peace process in 2004. Since then, there have been sporadic small clashes.

But last week, Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon said the peace process was "under stress," citing incidents along the LoC.

An insurgency against New Delhi's rule in Indian-administered Kashmir has raged since 1989, although Islamabad

denies it is giving assistance to the Muslim rebels.

Indian and Pakistani leaders are slated to meet at a South Asian summit in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo this weekend for their highest-level talks in 15 months to see if they can hold together the strained peace process.

In Srinagar, former chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed urged both sides to prevent border clashes.

India offers reward in blast probe

AFP, Surat

India yesterday offered a 120,000-dollar reward for help in arresting those responsible for a string of blasts in a western city that left 49 dead and more than 160 injured.

An Islamist group calling itself the "Indian Mujahedeen" has claimed responsibility for Saturday's blasts in Ahmedabad, the scene of deadly Hindu-Muslim riots in 2002, and warned of more attacks.

In the diamond-processing city of Surat, 200 kilometres south of Ahmedabad, 18 bombs were defused on Tuesday, and another one was disabled yesterday, police said. Two cars packed with explosives were found on Sunday.

"Enemies of this country are bent upon destroying it," said Narendra Modi, the firebrand Hindu nationalist chief minister of Gujarat state, where the two cities are located.

Modi, who announced the reward for information about the case, appealed to citizens to be "fully alert" about the possibility of more attacks.

বিস্মিল্লাহর রাহমানির রাহিম

শাখা স্থানান্তর

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Polls win fuels fear for democracy in Cambodia

AP, Phnom Penh

The landslide election victory of Cambodia's ruling party puts the country under one party rule and risks damaging its fragile democracy, rights groups said Wednesday.

Prime Minister Hun Sen's party claims it swept 90 of 123 seats in last weekend's parliamentary elections.

The result is expected to usher Hun Sen, who has ruled for 23 years, to a new 5-year term and give his party total domination of the lower house a result that human rights groups are calling dangerous for democracy.

"We have long feared that the country was heading toward becoming a one-party rule," said Thun Saray, a prominent human rights activist and head of election monitoring group Comfrel. "The election results are only confirming our fears. The power of the ruling party is now so great that no one can challenge it."

Cheam Yeap, a senior ruling party member, dismissed the criticism, saying his party is not a "dictatorship."

The ruling party will use its victory to strengthen, not weaken, democracy and the rule of law "to win more support and trust from the people."

Official results from the election are expected later this week. But few dispute the tally issued by the CPP, which appears to have cemented a two-thirds majority in the lower house and increased its presence from the 73 seats it held in the outgoing chamber.

Hun Sen's government has often been accused of corruption, human rights abuses, curtailing people's rights to peaceful protests and forcibly evicting poor citizens off their land so that it can be used for commercial development. The government has dismissed the accusations.

Independent Cambodian election monitoring groups say the opposition Sam Rainsy Party appears to have won 26 seats -- a two-seat gain from the 2003 polls and back the ruling party's tally of 90 for the ruling CPP.

Hun Sen has been at the center of Cambodian politics since 1985 when he became the world's youngest prime minister at age 33. He has held or shared the top job ever since, bullying and outfoxing his opponents to stay in power.

Nepal president asks Maoists to form govt

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's president has invited former Maoist rebels to form the first government in the world's newest republic in a bid to end weeks of political deadlock, according to a statement yesterday.

President Ram Baran Yadav gave the Maoists seven days to form the administration. Political wrangling has left Nepal without a formal government since it became a republic in late May after abolishing its monarchy.

The president "has called on the Maoists party to forge a political consensus for the appointment of the prime minister and formation of council of ministers within seven days," said a statement by the president's office.

The Maoists emerged as the single largest party in a newly-elected, 601-seat assembly that will produce the impoverished country's new constitution within two years.

But a dispute over which party should head the government has left Nepal in political limbo.

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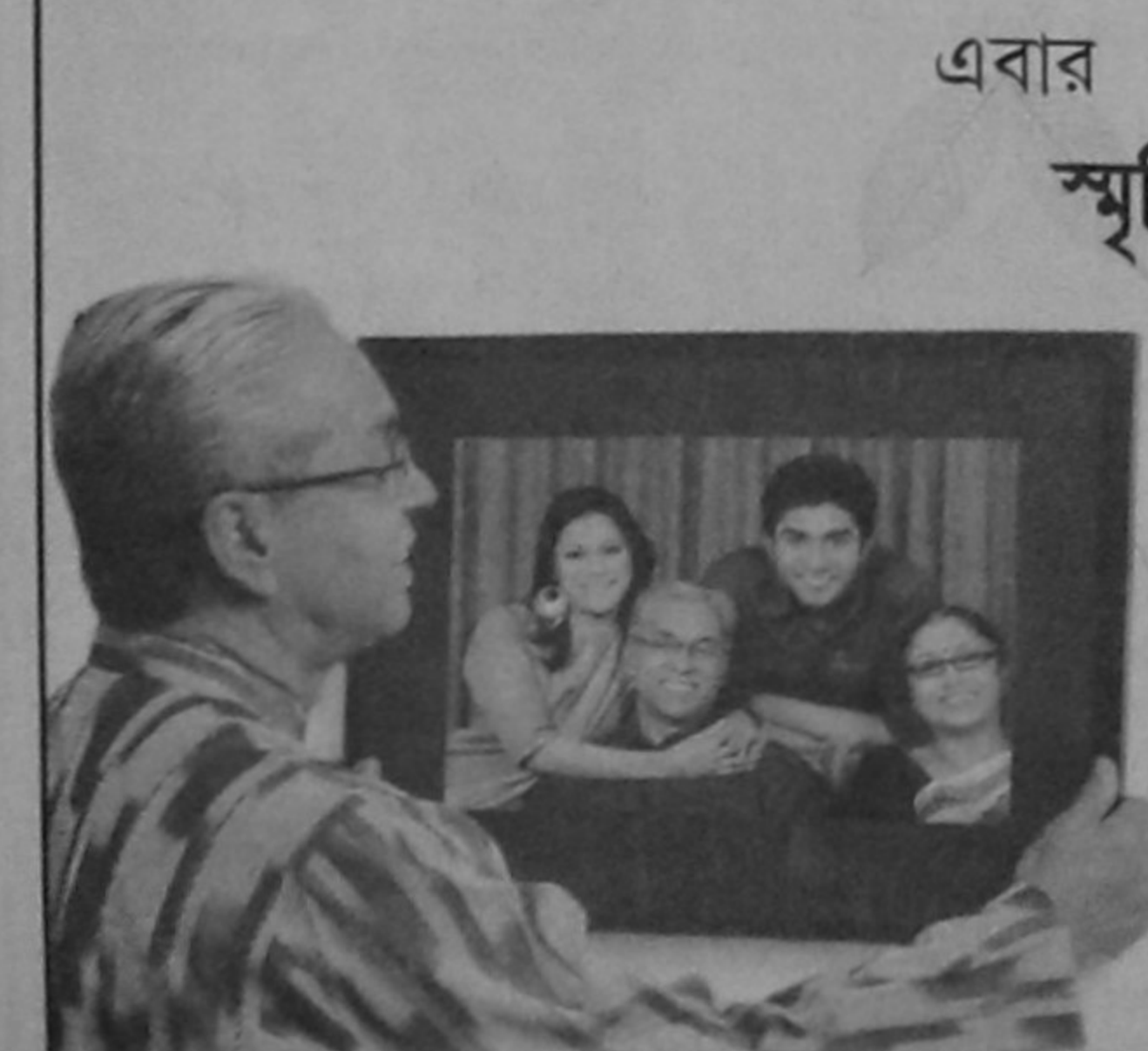
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