

## Indian PM stable after heart surgery

AFP, New Delhi

The heart bypass surgery performed on Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday was successful, a spokesman for the ruling Congress party said yesterday.

"The entire country is rejoicing because our prime minister has come out successfully from the operation," Congress spokesman Veerappa Moily told reporters. The procedure began at 7:15 am (0145 GMT) and doctors were upbeat about the prime minister's prognosis. "We expect the prime minister to be up on his feet in the next couple of days in the intensive care unit," Dr. Sudhir Vaishnav of Mumbai's Asian Heart Institute said, adding Singh should be back at work within "two to four weeks."

The operation was being carried out at the premier state-run All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi.

A high security ring was thrown around the hospital with gun-toting security personnel keeping a strict watch.

A hospital source earlier

told AFP doctors were "looking at the removal of two blockages. The rest of the regime will be decided when the surgery is on."

Singh, a diabetic who walks regularly, underwent heart bypass surgery in Britain in 1990 and angioplasty in 2003.

India is due to hold general elections before May.

Government officials said foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee would take charge of cabinet meetings during the premier's absence and would also assume control of the finance portfolio, currently held by Singh.

But no official acting prime minister had been named.

"Our confidence is that within two weeks he will be back to duty with more energy," said senior Congress party leader M. Veerappa Moily.

Mukherjee called his additional duties on Friday "normal, routine things" adding "the government is in place."

There has been widespread speculation that party chief Sonia Gandhi has been lining up her son, Rahul Gandhi, heir to India's powerful Gandhi dynasty, as the country's next prime minister.



Indian Minister of External Affairs and additional charge of Finance Pranab Mukherjee (C) waves as Indian President Pratiba Devi Singh Patil (L) looks on during a ceremony at the Presidential Palace in New Delhi yesterday. Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee will take charge of cabinet meetings during prime minister Manmohan Singh's absence, government officials said, while the premier undergoes heart surgery.

## AFGHANISTAN RAID LEAVES 15 DEAD

# Residents claim all killed were civilians

AP, Kabul

The US coalition in Afghanistan opened an investigation into an overnight raid early yesterday that American commanders say killed 15 armed militants but that two Afghan officials say killed 11 civilians.

A detailed US statement said multiple forces of militants fired on the coalition forces during a raid against a Taliban commander early Saturday in the eastern province of Laghman. The U.S. said a woman carrying a rocket-propelled grenade was among the 15 killed.

"We know the people who were killed were shooting at us," said Col Greg Julian, the top US spokesman in Afghanistan. "The people who were killed today were running around, maneuvering against our forces, and we killed them."

But Sayed Ahmad Safi, the spokesman for Laghman's governor, said that government intelligence reports indicated 11 of the dead were civilians, including three children and two females. Two of the dead were militants, he said.

Abdul Khaliq Hussaini, a member of parliament who represents Laghman, said he believed 16 people had been killed, including 11 civilians. The site of the raid the village of Guloch lies 60 kms northeast of the capital, Kabul.

Julian said a joint US-Afghan investigation had been launched.

Civilian deaths are a hugely sensitive topic between the Afghan government and the US and Nato.

President Hamid Karzai last week told parliament that the U.S. and NATO have not heeded his calls to stop airstrikes in civilian areas. Karzai has recently sought to have more control over what kinds of activities U.S. and NATO forces can carry out.

The issue also sparks strong emotions among average Afghans and threatens to turn civilians against the international military mission.

"I'm ready to start jihad against the Americans," an unidentified Afghan man told a Kabul TV station during a protest Saturday in the capital of Laghman.

Earlier Saturday, Hamididun Abdul Rahmzai, the head of the provincial council in Laghman, said village elders arrived at his office hours after the early morning operation to complain that the 15 killed were innocent civilians.

During a call from an Associated Press reporter, Rahmzai relayed questions to the village elders directly, who angrily shouted that they would swear on the Holy Quran that all those killed were civilians. The elders claimed that women

and children were among the dead.

The villagers told Rahmzai that they are shepherds and have no ties to militants.

Evaluating competing claims from the US and Nato militaries and Afghan officials or villagers is extremely difficult. Journalists and human rights monitors usually cannot reach the site of a raid because the territory is too dangerous.

Afghan villagers have been known to exaggerate civilian death claims in order to receive more compensation from the US military, and officials have said that insurgents sometimes force villagers to make false death claims.

But the US military has also been known to not fully acknowledge when it killed civilians.

After a battle in August in the village of Azizabad, the US military at first said no civilians were killed. A day later it said about five died, and eventually a more thorough US investigation found 33 civilians were killed. The Afghan government and the UN said 90 civilians were killed.

The Afghan government recently sent Nato headquarters a draft agreement that would give Afghanistan more control over future Nato deployments in the country and would prohibit Nato troops from conducting searches of Afghan homes.

## ANTI-TERROR CAMPAIGN IN PAKISTAN

# Death toll in US missile strikes rises to 22

AFP, Miranshah

Seven more bodies were recovered from the rubble of an Al-Qaeda den hit by a suspected US missile, pushing the death toll in two separate strikes to 22, security officials said yesterday.

"Seven bodies of local tribesmen were found in the rubble of the house which was destroyed in a US missile strike on Friday just outside the town of Mir Ali in North Waziristan district," the official said.

On Friday officials said eight people including five

foreigners -- Pakistani officials use the term "foreigners" to describe Al-Qaeda militants -- died in the missile strike at the house of a pro-Taliban tribesman near Mir Ali.

Hours later another suspected US drone fired two missiles into a house in Wana, the main town in South Waziristan, killing seven people.

The strikes were the first under new US President Barack Obama and effectively dashed any hopes that Pakistani officials were nurturing that the new adminis-

tration in Washington will halt such strikes.

Dozens of similar strikes since August have sparked government criticism of the United States, a close ally fighting the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan and believed to be firing the missiles from unmanned CIA aircraft.

Pakistan has repeatedly protested to Washington that drone strikes violate its territorial sovereignty and deepen resentment among the 160 million people of the nuclear-armed Islamic nation.



## Japan launches orbiter to probe greenhouse gases

AP, Tokyo

Japan on Friday launched the first satellite to monitor greenhouse gases worldwide, a tool to help scientists better judge where global warming emissions are coming from, and how much is being absorbed by the oceans and forests.

The orbiter, together with a similar US satellite to be launched next month, will represent an enormous leap in available data on carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere, now drawn from scattered ground stations.

"I'm saying Christmas is here," said an enthusiastic Inez Fung, an atmospheric scientist at the University of California, Berkeley. "Now we get about 100 observations every two weeks. With the satellite we'll get a million."

The satellite named "Ibuki," which means "breath" was sent into orbit along with seven other piggyback probes on a Japanese H2A rocket. Japan's space agency, JAXA, said the launch was a success, and officials said they were monitoring the satellites to ensure they entered orbit properly.

Human rights groups have accused the rebels of using the hundreds of thousands of civilians reported trapped in the area as human shields against the government's offensive.

Duamelle said both sides must make every effort to avoid civilian casualties and appealed to the rebels to let the local population move out of harm's way.

Fighting continued Friday, as Sri Lankan fighter jets and attack helicopters pounded Tamil Tiger positions across the war zone in support of advancing ground forces, the military said.

The rebel-affiliated Web site TamilNet said three civilians were killed and 33 wounded when army troops fired multi-barrel rocket launchers into civilian settle-



In this picture dated January 21, a Sri Lankan Tamil civilian girl wounded in shelling inside the island's rebel-held north arrives for treatment at a hospital in the government held northern town of Vavuniya. Officials said at least 60 people wounded in the latest fighting were brought to the hospital as the military authorities accused Tamil Tiger rebels of violating a no-war zone in the north and locating heavy guns to attack security forces.

ments in the rebel-held territory. The site also said insurgents killed 40 government soldiers. Health officials in the rebel-held area reported Thursday that the military had shelled a hospital and a village inside a government-declared "safe zone" for displaced families, killing at least 30 people. Health officials said at least 67 civilians were killed in shelling since Tuesday.

The military denied firing into the civilian settlements and launching attacks on the "safe zone" and accused the rebels of carrying out the assault themselves to keep the

civilians out of the area. Rebel spokesman were not available for comment, but have denied the accusation in the past.

Independent accounts of the fighting are not available because reporters are barred from the war zone.

The government has vowed to crush the rebel group and end the quarter-century civil war in this Indian Ocean island nation. In recent weeks troops have forced the rebels out of much of their heartland in the north, boxing them into a small corner of the northeast, the military said.

## Sircar reveals

FROM PAGE 1  
bench based on the number of their lawmakers. The Speaker has now allocated 10 seats for them.

Meanwhile, the issue of taking deputy speaker from the opposition has yet to be finalised. BNP alleges that the government side is backtracking from its earlier stance of appointing deputy speaker from the opposition.

Both the speaker and the deputy speaker would be elected in today's inaugural session of the ninth parliament. Expressing dissatisfaction over the Speaker's seating arrangement, Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said Sircar by acting unilaterally has shown disrespect to the treasury bench and the leader of the House. The Speaker could have invited them for discussion on the issue, he commented.

According to the Speaker's arrangement, BNP lawmakers get the front 10 seats in the opposition bench. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) chief Col (ret) Oli Ahmed has also been given a seat in the first row of opposition bench.

The 12 seats of the second row in the opposition bench have also been given to the opposition members including Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) chief Andaleeb Rahman Partho. The next third and fourth rows having five and four seats each also go to the opposition bench.

Two other seats have been kept vacant for the opposition lawmakers if elected from the two vacant seats of BNP chief Khaleda.

BNP has 28 seats in parliament, its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami two and another ally BJP one.

Sircar said the new speaker may change the seat planning if he wants.

According to the arrangements made by the British Parliament, Indian Lok Sabha and West Bengal Provincial Assembly, the leader of the opposition with his/her members sits on the left of the Speaker, Sircar said.

"The rest of the House is arranged given priority to the prime minister's advice through the chief whip," he added.

The Speaker also said no minister would sit on the left of the Speaker as per the plan of the chief whip. "That is why I have put all the ministers to the right, which is the treasury bench," he added.

"According to the rules of procedure, opposition members always sit on the left side of parliament and treasury bench on the right."

Asked whether Khaleda would attend the first day of the first session, Sircar said she has agreed to take part in parliament today and continue to do so unless any courtesy is shown to her and her party members and the constitution and the rules of procedure are violated.

AL General Secretary and LGRD Minister Syed Ashraf said the seating arrangement and deputy speaker issues would be finalised at the party's parliamentary meeting scheduled to be held at 2:00pm today.

He also said BNP has yet to select its parliamentary party whip and the arrangements were made by the chief whip and whips.

"Last time [2001-05] we came to parliament with only 60 members and we didn't get more seats in the front row. Many of our lawmakers had to sit on the backbench," he said.

"BNP has come to parliament with only 30 seats and Jatiya Party also got several seats. So, we will solve the issue in light of the past tradition and the proportion of seats," Ashraf added.

## Ordinance on RTI

FROM PAGE 1  
and rights organisations. Fakhruddin Ahmed-led administration promulgated the ordinance to ensure public access to information, which is considered a major tool to fight corruption.

Replying to a question, he said the caretaker government does not need the ninth parliament to ratify its failure to hold general election within 90 days and stay in power for nearly two years.

"A High Court (HC) bench has already accepted the Election Commission's explanation for failure to hold the parliamentary polls within the constitution-stipulated time limit," he told a meet-the-press programme at Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU).

He said the HC must have weighed carefully the implications of its decision which is now law.

Shafique said all 122 ordinances decreed by the president during the caretaker regime would be placed before parliament at its first sitting. The lawmakers will decide

which of those will be presented as bill to be made into laws considering public interest.

He however said the ordinances relating to elections, finance and budget must go through parliamentary debates.

Asked whether the ruling party has any plans to amend the constitution to provide for another deputy speaker, the law minister said it would be speculative to suggest anything now as the decision rests with parliament.

He said he does not know anything about the issue, which might be discussed at Awami League Parliamentary Party meeting today.

Shafique said they will strive for honest and competent judges filling the vacant posts in the High Court and Appellate Division as soon as possible to lessen the sufferings of justice seekers.

He said he is well aware that shortage of judges in both divisions of the Supreme Court is only adding to the already huge backlog of cases.

The law minister also said he supports separate independent secretariat for the lower judiciary and "it's expected that this question will be taken seriously."

About initiating trial of the war criminals, he said, "As of now, I have no information. I think the government will start working on the issue."

The matter may come up in parliament, he added. Asked about plans to scrap Islam as the state religion from the constitution, Shafique said in a democratic society the state cannot divide its citizens on the basis of religion.

Queried if the government would take steps to ban religion-based politics, he said politics exploiting religion could be stopped by the Special Powers Act. He urged journalists to marshal public support for an end to religion-based politics.

DRU President Shamim Ahmad presided over the meet and its General Secretary Pathik Shahra briefly spoke about functions of their organisation.

# JS rides on hope to session today

FROM PAGE 1  
ensure transparency and accountability of the activities of the executive and enact new laws and modify the existing ones to address the changing situation. So, the functions of the new parliament will dictate the fate of efforts to establish long cherished good governance in the country.

But, it is the attitude of the ruling Awami League (AL) -- which got an overwhelming majority in the December 29 ballots -- that will determine if it can discharge its constitutional tasks effectively.

It is also the responsibility of the ruling party to end the previous culture of making the House dysfunctional and come forward with patience and tolerance and allow opposition lawmakers, who are very small in number this time, to play their due role.

The ninth parliament begins its journey with only 31 opposition lawmakers of the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP). The number might increase if the opposition wins the by-elections to the two seats vacated by Khaleda Zia and participates in the election to the reserved seats for women in parliament.

As per the electoral laws, the main opposition BNP may get five out of the total 45 seats reserved for women.

The Election Commission (EC) will hold the election to the reserved seats and has already started making preparations to that end.

Bringing the opposition lawmakers into confidence to make parliament effective, instead of pushing them to the streets, is also a challenge for the ruling AL-led alliance, experts on parliamentary affairs said.

The opposition of the eighth parliament did not join the inaugural session but the BNP-led alliance announced to join parliament from the very first day.

The Business Advisory Committee of the new parliament will be formed today with the new speaker as its head. The committee will decide the tenure of the inaugural session and other businesses of parliament.

The standing committees on different ministries are likely to be formed in this session. Experts said the government will have to refrain from interfering in the functions of the crucial standing committees

through which parliament can effectively oversee activities of the executive and fight against corruption.

In previous parliaments, the ruling party with overwhelming majority failed to a great extent to deliver on people's expectations while the opposition parties opted to take to the streets most of the times rather than staying in the House.

Moreover, lawmakers spent most of their time and energy in fruitless criticism of their colleagues, lacking patience and tolerance, dodging responsibilities of making policies, enacting laws, overseeing the executive and bridging insights from their constituencies.

President Iajuddin Ahmed will address in the inaugural session, outlining some steps the newly elected government has to take in the days to come to make parliament effective and ensure good governance for the welfare of the country's people.

The newly formed cabinet led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already approved the presidential address.

Meanwhile, curiosity is running high about what the president will say on his con-

troversial assumption of the post of chief adviser at the end of 2006.

Iajuddin Ahmed, who was elected president in the eighth parliament on BNP's nomination, ignored constitutional provisions and assumed the office of the chief adviser amid strong opposition of the AL-led grand alliance.

His failure to discharge duties neutrally worsened the political situation. Finally, he was compelled to step down from the post declaring the state of emergency, which suspended the January 22 parliamentary election in 2007.

Election to the presidency will be held in the next 30 days as the tenure of the incumbent president expired long ago. The EC will hold the election and has already started making preparations for that.

Veteran AL leader Zillur Rahman is going to be elected the president of the country as the ruling party chief has already announced his name as party nominee for the presidency.

The session will begin with the outgoing speaker Jamiruddin Sircar in the chair. Sircar's partisan role was also one of the major obstacles to making the last parliament

effective.

At the very beginning of the session today, parliament will elect a new speaker and a deputy speaker. They will swear in their new offices immediately after being elected.

Sources said last night that the AL high command nominated advocate Abdul Hamid for the election to the post of speaker.

In the first sitting, the government will place an unprecedented number of 122 ordinances promulgated by the immediate past caretaker government for parliament's decision whether to ratify those within 30 days.

Recommendations of a legal experts committee formed by the government to review the ordinances have meanwhile given hints that many of the ordinances might not be ratified, in which case their validity will automatically expire with the end of the 30-day timeframe.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said a few ordinances promulgated during the last two years were not necessary and they were promulgated without discus-

sion with the stakeholders.

He said a few ordinances concerning election, finance and budget will have to be made into laws through parliamentary debates.

The inaugural session is also likely to clear the uncertainty over the fate of the local government institutions, particularly upazila parishads, city corporations and municipalities, as the newly elected government opposes some crucial provisions in the ordinances on them promulgated by the caretaker government.

These ordinances regarding formation and functions of these local government bodies curtailed lawmakers' power to interfere in the activities of upazila parishads and inserted provisions for their resignation from party posts before taking oath to the bodies they get elected to.

The new parliament will also have to decide the legitimacy of the immediate past caretaker government's unconstitutional tenure of around two years.

Disposing a writ petition on the matter, the High Court has already given its observation that the new parliament will take decision on this.

Many experts have observed

that the constitution requires to be amended to indemnify the caretaker government's term.

The law minister, however, said yesterday that the last caretaker government does not require ratification by parliament for failing to hold general election within 90 days and staying in power for nearly two years.

**OPPOSITION STRENGTH IN PARLIAMENTS**  
Of the previous parliaments, only seventh and eighth parliaments completed the five-year tenure.

The fifth and seventh parliaments had strong opposition benches in terms of number of lawmakers. But they failed to play due role and took to the streets blaming that the treasury benches pushed them to boycott the House.

In the eighth parliament, 74 lawmakers were from the opposition bench while the fourth parliament had 33 lawmakers in the opposition.

The first parliament had the lowest number of seven opposition lawmakers and none was recognised as the leader of the opposition. Nevertheless, that opposition played a very strong role to put pressure on the treasury bench to do the right thing.