

Review petition to be filed on Sharif disqualification

XINHUA, AFP, Islamabad/ Gujranwala

A review petition will be filed on the disqualification case of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother following the government's decision to reinstate deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry.

Pakistan's Attorney General Latif Khosa has directed the deputy attorney general to file a review petition in the Sharif brothers' eligibility case, Geo TV channel said.

Last month, a Supreme Court verdict banned Nawaz Sharif, also chief of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and his brother Shabbaz Sharif from holding office.

The verdict also removed Shabbaz Sharif from the office of chief minister of

Pakistan's Punjab province.

Nawaz Sharif termed the verdict as 'unconstitutional', and decided to participate in the 'long march' aimed at restoring the judges sacked in November 2007 when then president Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency.

The lawyers and political activists kicked off their 'long march' March 12, and planned to reach capital Islamabad Monday to stage a massive sit-in.

But Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani early Monday morning announced the restoration of the deposed chief justice in a bid to defuse the political turmoil.

Earlier Pakistan's main opposition leader Nawaz Sharif on Monday said he had agreed to call off a mass protest march

after the government decided to reinstate the deposed chief justice.

"We are now calling off this long march," he said from inside his SUV, showered with pink rose petals and stranded in a sea of jubilant supporters in the central city of Gujranwala.

He said the decision had been taken following discussions with lawyers and leaders of allied political parties, such as cricket hero Imran Khan.

"Today the nation has received very happy news. We have said that we will restore the judges and the independent judiciary and by the grace of Allah we have achieved it," he said.

"Very soon we will play our role in implementing real democracy in this country," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati (2R) smiles while posing with leaders of newly formed Third-Front in New Delhi on Sunday.

Gunmen seize 4 UN workers in Somalia

AP, Mogadishu

Gunmen seized four UN workers in southern Somalia yesterday, a UN spokeswoman said, the latest in a series of attacks on aid workers in the war-ravaged Horn of Africa nation.

Dawn Blalock said no violence was reported during the abduction in the north-western Somali town of Wajid. There had been no contact with the kidnappers so far.

"The United Nations and the local authorities ... are doing everything to secure the unconditional release of the staff," she said in a statement.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian girl holds a picture of a relative and of jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti (L) during a protest yesterday at the Red Cross offices in Gaza City calling for the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Karat lashes out at UPA for 'nakedly pro-rich' policies

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had adopted policies that were "nakedly pro-rich", Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) general secretary Prakash Karat said in New Delhi yesterday.

"We want an alternative secular government in the country," Karat said while releasing his party's manifesto for the elections.

"We place the UPA squarely

responsible for this unacceptable growing divide between a handful of rich people and vast masses of our people," he told reporters.

Referring to the public distribution system (PDS), he said the Manmohan Singh-led government had weakened it instead of strengthening it.

He said the government had adopted an "attitude of hesitation and compromise" on communal issues and referred to attacks on minorities in Kandhamal in Orissa and in Karnataka.

CPI-M does not rule out joining Third Front govt

PTI, New Delhi

Unlike in the past, CPI-M yesterday did not rule out its participation in any Third Front government after the Lok Sabha polls.

CPI-M General Secretary Prakash Karat also said that steps would be taken to ensure that such non-Congress, non-BJP alternatives do not remain unstable like in the past.

He, however, did not elaborate "Hopefully, if a situation develops, our central committee will meet. We will see the

situation, take stock of it and decide the question," Karat told reporters releasing the party manifesto here.

He was asked whether the Left parties would, as always, remain outside the government in such a scenario or would they join such an alternative.

In the non-Congress governments so far, the CPI(M) had stayed away so also the RSP and Forward Bloc while the CPI had joined the United Front government headed H D Deve Gowda and I K Gujral.

Archaeologists claim discovery of Cleopatra's younger sister

ANI, London

A team of archaeologists and forensic experts has claimed to have found the skeleton of Cleopatra's younger sister, who was murdered more than 2,000 years ago on the orders of the Egyptian queen.

According to a report in The Times, the remains of Princess Arsinoe, put to death in 41 BC on the orders of Cleopatra and her Roman lover Mark Antony to eliminate her as a rival, are the first relics of the Ptolemaic dynasty to be identified.

The breakthrough, by an Austrian team, has provided pointers to Cleopatra's true ethnicity.

Scholars have long debated whether she was Greek or Macedonian like her ancestor the original Ptolemy, a Macedonian general who was made ruler of Egypt by Alexander the Great, or whether she was North African.

IRA plotting to kill Princes William, Harry

PTI, London

The security cover for Britain's Princes William and Harry has been stepped up over fears that IRA terrorists are plotting to assassinate the royals, a news report said today.

Scotland Yard fears the Princes, who are officers in the British Army, are prize targets for Irish Republican Army (IRA).

The number of close protection officers guarding the two royals on each shift has been increased, Britain's Sunday Express reported today. The threat level has been upgraded following the murders of two soldiers and a police officer in Northern Ireland.

11 killed in suicide attack on Afghan police HQ

Nine foreign troops die in attacks

AP, AFP, Kandahar/ Kabul

A suicide bomber in a police uniform detonated explosives he was carrying inside a police headquarters in southern Afghanistan yesterday, killing 11 people and wounding 29 others, the Interior Ministry said.

The bombing followed a surge in violence in Afghanistan over the weekend that led to the deaths of nine foreign troops, including four Americans.

The bomber Monday set off his explosives after slipping inside the main police building in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, while the police were exercising, said Asadullah Sherzad, the provincial police chief.

The attack killed nine police and two civilians and wounded 29 others, mostly police, the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

The attack is most likely the work of Taliban militants, who regularly use suicide bombers in their attacks against Afghan and foreign forces in the country.

The lightly armed police force has suffered greatly in Taliban attacks, with more

than 800 officers killed in 2008 alone.

Southern Afghanistan is the centre of the Taliban insurgency. The US is sending thousands of new troops to the south this year to try to reverse Taliban gains. The Islamic militants have made a violent comeback the last three years following an apparent initial defeat after the 2001 US invasion.

Nine international soldiers and three Afghan civilians were killed in a bloody weekend of attacks in Afghanistan linked to a Taliban-led insurgency, officials said.

Attacks in Helmand over the weekend killed three British troops, while a roadside bomb in the east Sunday killed four US troops. A French soldier was also killed in a clash on Saturday, making the weekend one of the deadliest two-day periods for international troops in weeks.

Three other ISAF soldiers died in Afghanistan on Saturday. One was French, another British and the nationality of the third has not been released.

The spike in violence is an early indication that roadside bombs and other ambushes

are likely to surge as some 17,000 US forces arrive in Afghanistan this year to bolster the record 38,000 Americans already in the country.

In other violence Monday, a suicide attacker in the western province of Farah shot and killed a policeman outside a government building, then entered the building and detonated a suicide bomb, wounding two civilians, said Rauf Ahmad, a police spokesman in western Afghanistan.

The Taliban, who were in government between 1996 and 2001, have carried out a wave of similar attacks across the besieged country with other radical factions and criminals also behind a tide of violence.

The US military said meanwhile that soldiers killed five militants in an operation early Sunday about 60 kilometres (40 miles) west of Kandahar city.

Three others were detained, it said in a statement.

ISAF has swollen to reach nearly 62,000 soldiers from 42 countries, according to its website. The separate US-led coalition is believed to include around 13,000 troops.

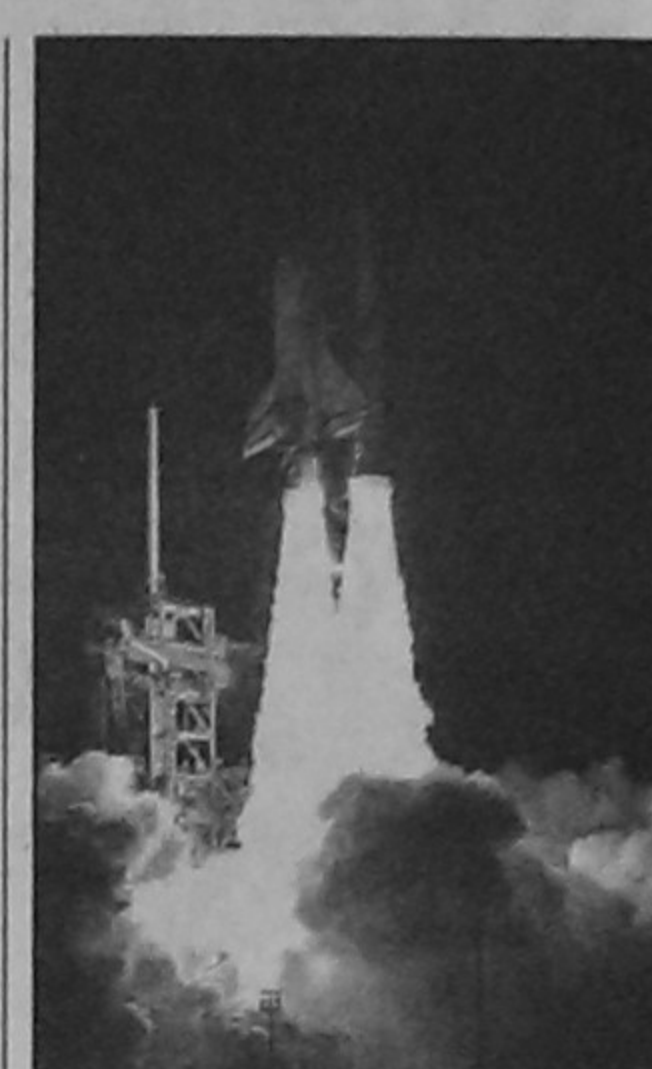


PHOTO: AFP

The US Space Shuttle Discovery lifts off Sunday at Kennedy Space Centre in Florida.

Discovery nears space station after delayed launch

AP, Cape Canaveral

Seven astronauts raced to the international space station aboard the space shuttle Monday after a successful launch that was delayed five times and caused the mission to be shortened by a day.

The delays forced a spacewalk to be axed, but mission managers said they would still be able to complete 80 to 90 percent of the tasks they had planned. The cancelled spacewalk chores will be tackled by the space station crew after Discovery leaves.

Intelligence

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two-hour-long meeting. The premier and the senior ministers at the meeting expressed dissatisfaction over a home ministry report on militant outfits.

The cabinet earlier asked the ministry to submit a complete report on militant activities including the August 17 serial bomb blasts across the country with findings about the mastermind behind the blasts, their sources of finance and ammunition, people involved in it and the reason for the intelligence agencies' failure to prevent it.

Some ministers who attended the meeting told The Daily Star that the prime minister was unhappy about the report as the home ministry failed to incorporate the information in it.

Terming the report 'incomplete', Hasina directed the ministry to come up with an in-depth report.

"The home ministry submitted the report based on information before 31 December, 2008. Although many incidents including the BDR mutiny happened in the country after the election, it had no information about those," said a minister wishing not to be named.

Meanwhile, the home ministry directed deputy commissioners, superintendents of police and intelligence agencies to hunt down militants and prepare a list of militants and their outfits.

"We have directed the deputy commissioners, superintendents of police to find out the militants and take actions against them," said Home Secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder after holding a meeting with the ministry officials.

The cabinet approved the proposed amendment to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Act 2003 and renamed the national award on agriculture the Bangabandhu National Agriculture Award.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sharif savours victory

AFP, Islamabad

The restoration of top judges two years after their dismissal will give Pakistan desperately needed rule of law and marks up a victory for opposition leader Nawaz Sharif, analysts said.

Hours before a planned march by lawyers and opposition parties was due to descend on Islamabad, the government Monday caved into public pressure and agreed to reinstate the judges and end a repressive crackdown on activists.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, in a dawn address to the nation, announced that all judges including chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry sacked by former military ruler Pervez Musharraf would resume office from March 21.

The decision came after a series of meetings he and army chief General Ashfaq Kayani held with President Asif Ali Zardari to avert bloodshed and instability in the frontline US ally in the 'war on terror'.

Main opposition leader

Sharif, a former prime minister who galvanised opponents of Zardari and led thousands of protesters in a march out of Lahore, hailed the announcement and promptly called off a mass protest.

The government's climbdown was widely seen as a product of Western pressure on Zardari to defuse the standoff with Sharif, and Gilani's orders to release hundreds of people in detention as a victory for rights.

"I think it's a huge victory for civil society, lawyers and Nawaz Sharif," defence and political analyst Talat Masood said. "It came too late but it came before (the protesters reached) Islamabad" and averted expected clashes.

"Sharif took a firm stand, his stature has gone up," he said.

"For the first time in Pakistan's history, an independent judiciary will be there to strengthen the rule of law."

"It will also help counter radicalism and extremism," US officials were seen as

instrumental in trying to encourage Zardari and Sharif to end their standoff.

Masood said Americans played a "very positive" role. "They have understood that Sharif's party is an important political force in Pakistan and there is no need to have any confrontation. Their role was very constructive."

Jaffer Ahmed, director of the Pakistan Study Centre at Karachi University, described the agreement as a major step forward for the country, but slammed Zardari for miscalculating at every stage.

"President Zardari lost a good opportunity to take ownership of the lawyers movement. Nawaz Sharif captured it and emerged as a big leader," he said.

"Sharif's right-wing party has become popular and the secular Pakistan People's Party is weakened. It is alienated by the civil society, because of Zardari's wrong policies and wrong advisers," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Presidential candidate of the Farabundo Marti for the Liberation National Front (FMLN) Mauricio Funes speaks in San Salvador on Sunday. Funes, candidate of a party of leftist former rebels, declared himself the winner of El Salvador's closely-contested presidential election, signalling an end to 20 years of right-wing rule.