

Nepal president orders polls to elect new PM

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

Nepal's President Ram Baran Yadav Sunday asked the interim parliament to hold an election to choose a new prime minister after the nation's major parties failed to meet his Saturday deadline for stitching up a consensus coalition. The presidential office said Yadav sent a letter Sunday to the parliament secretariat, asking it to ready for the election of a new prime minister through simple majority.

However, it was not clear immediately if the secretariat would be able to call an election. The Maoist party, whose government collapsed last week, has vowed not to allow the house to function till its row with the president is resolved.

Since Monday, when Nepal's first Maoist Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda resigned after failing to fire the army chief, Gen Rookmangud Katawal, his simmering party has kept up public protests against the president, who reinstated the general.

The former rebels have also prevented the house from sitting.

The onus to appease the former guerrillas is now on their former allies, the communists, who said they would lead the new government.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Unified

Marxist Leninist (UML) has formed a nine-member committee to woo the other major parties and informal negotiations are likely to start Sunday.

But the Maoists, who say the president undermined civilian supremacy by bringing back the army chief who had defied the government, are demanding that the general be dismissed first and the president tender an apology before they consent to join or support a new ruling alliance.

Even if the former guerrillas allow the election, it remains uncertain if the UML would win the race.

With only 109 MPs in the 601-member house, it will need the support of more parties even though the main opposition Nepali Congress (NC) has agreed to stand behind it.

The NC has 114 members and even together, the two parties still fall short of the 302-vote mark.

Three Terai parties together can help the UML come to power since they have over 80 lawmakers between them.

However, with the regional bloc yet to spell out who it will support, there is also a possibility of the Maoists, who are the largest party with 238 MPs, returning to power if they can woo the Terai parties.

SC stayed HC order on Babar's bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday stayed for a week a High Court (HC) order granting bail to former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar in an arms case.

Earlier, Babar was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment by a trial court.

Upon hearing on an appeal filed by Babar, the HC granted him bail for 3 months on May 5 this year.

The government yesterday filed a petition with the SC to stay the HC order.

After hearing, Chamber Judge Justice Md Abdul Aziz stayed the HC order till May 17 and also asked the government to file a regular leave-to-appeal petition with this court against the HC order by May 17.

On March 5 this year, a Dhaka court sent Babar to jail after he surrendered and sought bail.

The HC earlier on March 4 directed him to surrender before the trial court as per the SC order.

Meanwhile, a HC bench rejected a petition yesterday filed by former BNP lawmaker Ali Asghar Lobi for quashing the proceedings against him in a reliefappropriation case.

Following the HC verdict, trial of this corruption case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) against Lobi will run at the trial court.

The ACC filed the case with Batiaghata Police Station on July 1, 2007.

BDR probe body

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to disclose any probe findings.

The committee headed by retired bureaucrat Anisuzzaman Khan was given a month's time as it sought time extension for the fourth time for detailed enquiry into the carnage. The latest extension was given in the last week of March.

Meanwhile, 149 BDR jawans were arrested at different battalions and campus of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in Bandarban and Rangamati yesterday following filing of sedition cases against them in connection with the mutiny outside the Pilkhana on February 25-26.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) assisted by army personnel arrested the BDR jawans--110 from Bolipara 10 Rifles Battalions and 39 others from BDR camps in three upazilas of Rangamati--and produced them before courts in Bandarban and Rangamati.

In Dhaka, four BDR jawans confessed to their involvement in the Pilkhana carnage yesterday while three others were placed on seven days' remand each for interrogation.

Our correspondent in Bandarban reports: Under tight security the 110 BDR jawans were produced before a Bandarban court yesterday. They were arrested the same day.

The court ordered them to be sent to jail.

Earlier, police filed separate sedition cases against 232

BDR jawans of Bolipara 10 Rifles Battalion and Naikhangchhari 15 Rifles Battalion.

Our Rangamati correspondent adds: Police yesterday arrested 39 BDR jawans at BDR camps in Baghaichhari, Longudu and Barkal upazilas. A Rangamati court had issued arrest warrants after sedition cases were filed against them.

The court sent the arrestees to Rangamati jail.

Of the 39 arrested BDR jawans, 18 were arrested at Marishya BDR camp, 16 at Chhotohariana camp under Barkal upazila and five at Rajnagar under Longudu BDR camp.

Our court correspondent reports: Four BDR members--deputy assistant directors (DADs) Abdul Jalil and Mirza Habibur Rahman and sepoys Selim Reza and Kazol Ali made confessional statements before magistrates admitting their involvement in the Pilkhana carnage.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is investigating the mutiny case in Dhaka, also produced five other BDR jawans--Nayek Mainul Haque, Lance Nayek Ziaul Haque, Abdul Muhith and Ramzan Ali--before a Dhaka court with a petition for showing them arrested in the case.

Of them, sepoys Ziaul Haque, Abdul Muhith and Ramzan Ali were later placed on seven days' remand each.

The court ordered the condolence book.

Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh made a phone call to Hasina yesterday

Dr Wazed laid to rest

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eminent personalities, chiefs of the three forces and hundreds of people from all walks of life joined his janaza led by Khatib of the national mosque Maulana Salauddin.

Among others, Dr Wazed's elder brother Abdul Khaleque Miah, former president Tajuddin Ahmed, former chief adviser Habibur Rahman, former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, Al. General Secretary Abdul Jalil, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Dewar Hossain, Jatiya Party Secretary General Ruhul Amin Hawlader, LDP President Oli Ahmed, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Krishak Sramik Janata League President Abdul Kader Siddiqui and Jatiya Party (Manju) Acting President Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Dhaka University VC Dr AAMS Arefin Siddique took part in the janaza.

Dr Wazed's body was kept in front of the mosque for a few minutes for people of all walks of life to pay their last respect.

Later an air force helicopter carrying his body flew to Fatehpur at about 11:45am.

Two other helicopters carrying Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana, Jatiya Party Chairman HMI Ershad along with some family members arrived at Piroganj at about 12:20pm, reports our correspondent from Rangpur.

As soon as the dead body arrived at about 1:00pm, relatives, admirers and dear and near ones of Dr Wazed could not hold back their tears. The news of the arrival of Wazed's body cast a pall of gloom on his ancestral village.

The second janaza of Dr Wazed was held at Piroganj High School ground at about 1:15pm where a platoon of police paid him state honour. His body was then taken to Fatehpur Laldighi Primary School where a third Janaza was held at about 1:30pm.

The coffin of Wazed was shrouded in a national flag. He was accorded a guard of honour before the janaza with bugles playing melancholies.

Dr Wazed was laid to rest beside the graveyards of his father Abdul Kader Miah and mother Moyzunnesa. Dr Wazed's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy might arrive today morning.

Hasina, Rehana and others left Fatehpur at about 4:00pm.

A book of condolence was opened at PM's official residence Jamuna and it will be available for three days for diplomats and representatives of donor agencies to show their respects to the late scientist.

In the capital, head of 42 foreign missions and development organisations including USA, India, China, Pakistan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Netherlands, Japan, UAE, Canada, Australia and UNDP signed the condolence book.

Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh made a phone call to Hasina yesterday

morning to express his condolence and sympathy, said prime minister's Deputy Press Secretary Mahbubul Huq Shakil.

He said Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also conveyed condolence message to Hasina yesterday.

Born on February 16, 1942 at Fatehpur village of Piroganj upazila in Rangpur, Dr Wazed was the youngest among four brothers and three sisters. He also served as the chief of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Morshed Khan

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that on March 15, 2007 their client had gone abroad for treatment after being advised by his physicians. But later he was convicted in the graft case in absentia. Meantime, their client having returned to the country yesterday came to know about his conviction in the case and surrendered before the court and sought bail.

The prosecution lawyer Moshrarrif Hossain Kajol opposed the bail petition but he did not oppose the petition for providing the convict treatment and first class division in jail.

After the hearing, the judge ordered to send Morshed Khan to jail directing the jail authorities to give him proper treatment and first class division as per Jail Code. The court also directed the authorities concerned to attach conviction warrant against the convict.

Morshed Khan went into hiding after the crackdown began on graft suspects during the army-backed caretaker government. One of his lawyers told The Daily Star that Morshed Khan returned from Singapore at 10:30 am yesterday.

The former minister, also a BNP leader, was handed down 10 years' RI for acquiring wealth through dishonest means and three years' RI for hiding information about his wealth. The jail terms will run consecutively.

The court ordered confimation of Morshed's ill-gotten wealth worth Tk 82.22 lakh.

His wife Nasrin Khan, who also is on the run, was accused in the case for aiding and abetting him in the illegal earning. But the High Court quashed corruption proceeding against her.

ACC Assistant Director Talebor Rahman filed the case against Morshed and his wife with Gulshan police station on December 10 last year for amassing wealth worth Tk 1.70 crore illegally and concealing information about wealth worth Tk 91.34 lakh.

About 20,000 opposition supporters rallied

Iraq PM says they don't need US troops in cities

AFP, Bagdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki assured visiting US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi yesterday that his country's security will be unaffected by the planned American troop withdrawal from Iraqi cities.

"We don't need big numbers of (US) military forces inside the cities after we get control of them," Maliki said in a statement after talks with the top US lawmaker, who arrived in Baghdad on an unannounced visit.

"The responsible withdrawal (of US troops) will not affect the security situation," Maliki added.

A fierce critic of the 2003-US invasion ordered by former president George W. Bush, Pelosi's one-day visit came as US troops prepare to withdraw from Iraq's urban areas by the end of next month despite a spike in violence.

The withdrawal is a key part of a military accord signed by Baghdad and Washington last November that will also see US troops leave the country by the end of 2011.

Maliki said Iraq's military efforts were now concentrated on improving its intelligence services.

The US Congress, for its part, should try to develop bilateral relations focused on the scientific and economic agreements signed by the two countries, he said.

"Under stability, we are seeking to develop our economy, especially the oil industry, after multinationals have already come to work and invest in the sector," he said.

Pelosi said that Washington would stick to its part of the agreement on troop withdrawals.

"I can't speak to what the attitude is in Iraq, but what I do know that this is the plan that has been agreed upon, and we want to honour that," the California Democrat said after meeting parliament speaker Iyad al-Samarrai.

The US military currently has about 139,000 troops in Iraq.

in central Tbilisi on Saturday to mark the one-month anniversary of the start of protests.

Opposition leaders offered talks with the government last week after riot police clashed with protesters in the first major outbreak of violence since the protests began. Police said nobody was seriously injured.

At a meeting with parliament speaker David Bakradze on Friday they demanded direct talks with Saakashvili.

The clashes and a brief bloodless military mutiny last week raised fears of wider unrest in Georgia, which is currently hosting controversial NATO military exercises that have infuriated neighbouring Russia.

On the eastern end of the Black Sea, and the southern side of the Caucasus mountains, the former Soviet republic is regarded as strategic both by the transatlantic alliance and by Moscow.

The opposition accuses Saakashvili of mishandling last summer's war with Russia and of becoming increasingly autocratic since coming to power in the peaceful 2003 Rose Revolution.

Tensions have increased in recent days but officials have vowed there would be no repeat of events in November 2007 when riot police used water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse thousands of protesters.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin criticised the NATO exercises on Sunday as a sign of support for Saakashvili's government.

Bangladesh Computer Council

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