

BENAZIR KILLING

Musharraf may be quizzed

ANI, INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Amidst the rising demand for former President General Pervez Musharraf's prosecution following the UN enquiry commission's report over former Minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination, Presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar has said that the 'autocratic' ruler may be quizzed in the case.

Babar said the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has asked Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani to take action against all those involved including Musharraf. The Daily News quoted Babar, as saying.

"The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has already asked Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani to take action against all those involved including Musharraf," The Daily News quoted Babar, as saying.

Meanwhile, former Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf has said he could not be held responsible for Benazir Bhutto's assassination as he was neither the head of the government nor the army chief at the time of the Dec 27, 2007 incident.

Musharraf was of the view that those who headed the government at the time should be questioned about the security lapses that led to the former prime minister's killing. The News said Wednesday in a despatch from Washington, quoting a close aide of the former president.

Shaukat Aziz was the prime minister at the time but Musharraf was all-powerful, enjoying sweeping powers that have only now been taken away from the presidency and transferred back to the prime minister's office.

A UN commission has blamed Pakistani authorities for their failure to protect Bhutto, saying security arrangements were 'fatally insufficient and ineffective' and subsequent investigations into her death involved a whitewash.



Leader of opposition and senior leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Shushma Swaraj (R), Lal Krishna Advani (C), President Nitin Gadkari (2L) and fellow senior leaders stand on top of a truck as they lead a rally in New Delhi yesterday, held as a part of a nationwide agitation to protest spiralling prices of essential commodities.

BJP stages protests over food prices

BBC ONLINE

Thousands of people have gathered in the Indian capital, Delhi, to take part in an opposition rally to protest against rising food prices.

The rally by the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has led to massive traffic jams in the city.

BJP leaders say an estimated 300,000 people will attend a meeting at the Ramlila grounds and then thousands of activists will march to parliament.

Food prices in India have risen by as much as 20% over the past year.

BJP MPs boycotted parliament yesterday to join the protest.

'WRONG POLICIES' Senior party leaders, including LK Advani, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jaitley, Rajnath Singh and BJP chief Nitin Gadkari, are due to address the rally.

Sushma Swaraj said hundreds of thousands of people had come from all over the country to take part in the protest.



Britain's Queen turns 84

AP, London

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is marking her 84th birthday with a quiet day at Windsor Castle with her husband, Prince Philip.

The queen marks her birthday twice a year: privately on the actual birthday, which is Wednesday, and officially with the "Trooping the Colour" ceremony that is traditionally held in June, when the weather is better.

Nato apologises for civilian deaths in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Nato yesterday apologised for the deaths of four people who were shot by international troops earlier this week, saying reports that two of them were insurgents were incorrect.

Four Afghan civilians were shot by foreign troops in Khost province on Monday, according to earlier reports from Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf).

Isaf said on Tuesday a convoy returning to base was approached by a vehicle that turned off its lights and accelerated towards them.

"Isaf personnel then fired warning shots, but the vehicle continued to accelerate. Several rounds were fired in an attempt to disable the vehicle, and finally shots were fired into the vehicle itself," it said in a statement.

"All four died of wounds at the scene," it said of the occupants.

A spokesman for the Afghan education ministry, Mohammad Asif Nang, said the four were students and had died when "the foreign forces opened fire on them".

The four students -- aged between 12 and 19 and including two brothers -- had been unarmed.

Ulfa splits over peace process

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Guwahati

The outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) appears to have vertically split with its elusive commander-in-chief Paresh Baruah sidelining the other top leaders, most of whom are either in jail or out on bail, over the peace process.

At a time when Ulfa vice chairman Pradip Gogoi and publicity chief Mithinga Daimary were mobilising public opinion in furthering the deadlocked peace process, Paresh Baruah took a belligerent posture - no talks and no compromise on its demand for sovereignty or independence.

Rajapakse triumphs in final count

AP, Colombo

President Mahinda Rajapakse's ruling party increased its parliamentary gains yesterday after new voting in Sri Lanka's elections, but fell short of the two-thirds majority it had sought to make constitutional changes.

Rajapakse's United People's Freedom Alliance secured a total of 144 seats in the 225-member Parliament after a revote was held Tuesday in some areas affected by fraud and other seats were allocated.

The victory follows Rajapakse's re-election in presidential polls three months ago.

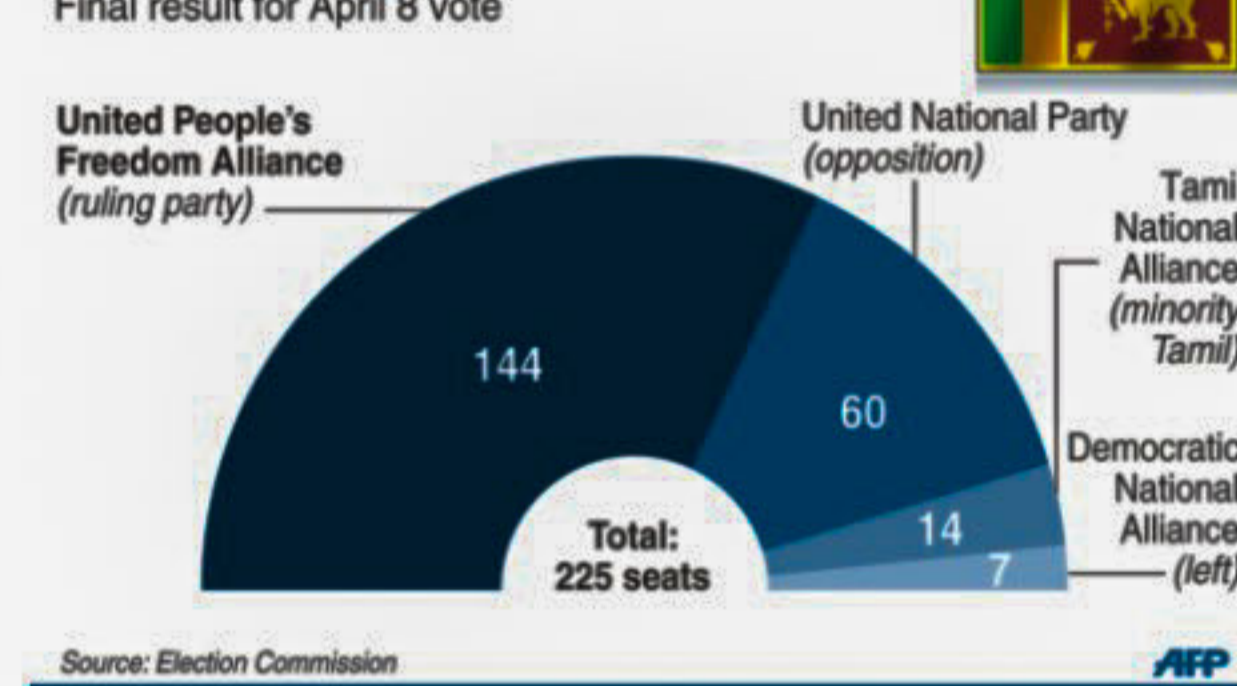
The final results mean the ruling party can form a government with a simple majority, but it is six seats short of its

goal of a two-thirds majority, which Rajapakse had asked for in order to make unspecified changes to the constitution. Government officials have speculated that the planned

changes may include electoral reform and provisions against promoting separatism after the government's military victory against the Tamil Tiger rebels last year.

Sri Lanka parliament

Final result for April 8 vote



Aid running out for 1.3m Pak refugees

AFP, Islamabad

Thousands of Pakistanis continue to flee Taliban-plagued northwest provinces every day, but money is running out to help the 1.3 million people displaced by fighting, aid agencies warned yesterday.

Pakistan faced its biggest humanitarian crisis in decades last year when three million people fled a military onslaught to dislodge Taliban rebels from the northwest Swat valley, prompting an outpouring of international help.

But as the year has passed, donor money has dried up, forcing aid groups to cut projects, despite the expansion of military operations in the northwest and the ongoing needs of families too frightened to return home.

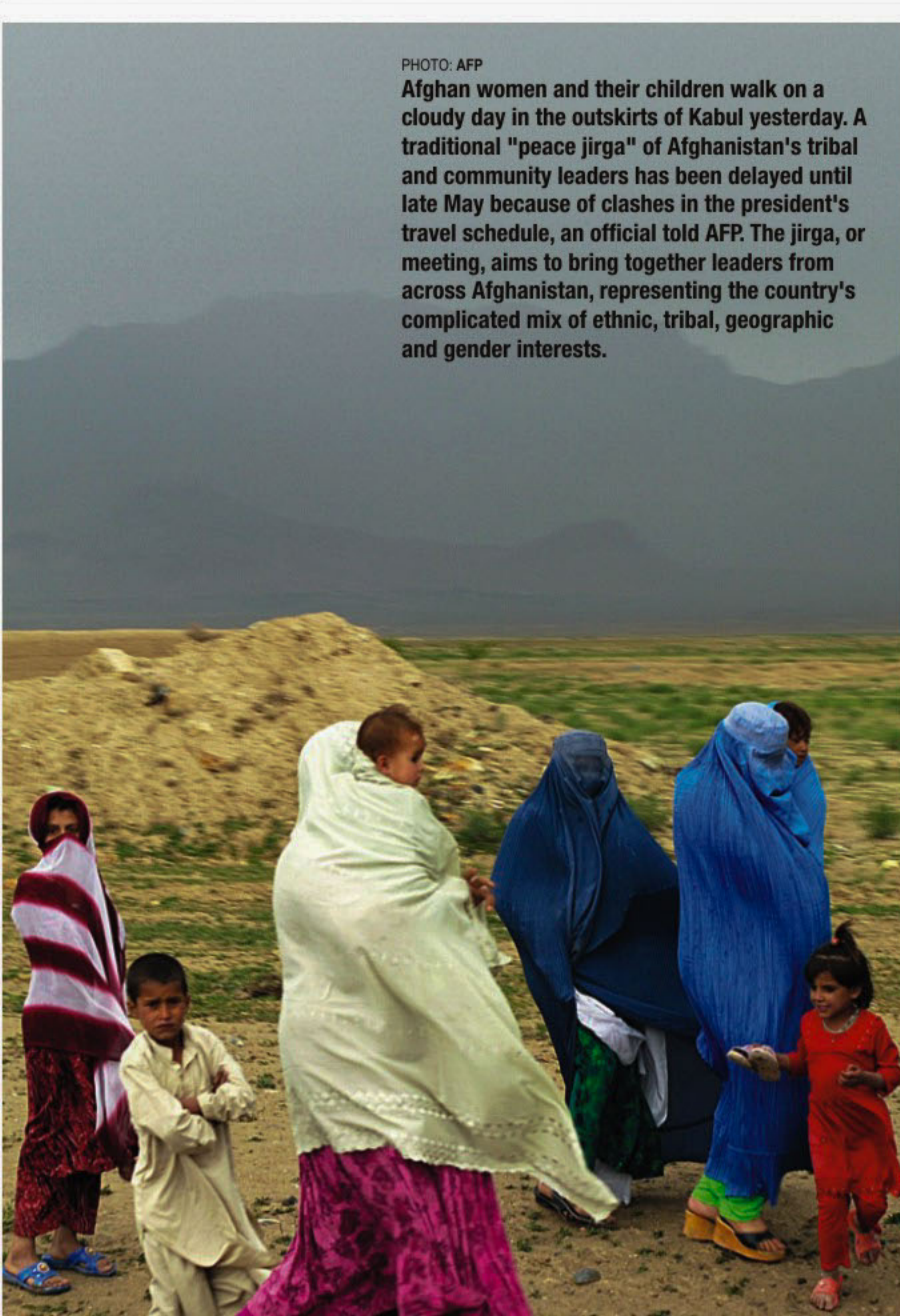


PHOTO: AFP

Afghan women and their children walk on a cloudy day in the outskirts of Kabul yesterday. A traditional "peace jirga" of Afghanistan's tribal and community leaders has been delayed until late May because of clashes in the president's travel schedule, an official told AFP. The jirga, or meeting, aims to bring together leaders from across Afghanistan, representing the country's complicated mix of ethnic, tribal, geographic and gender interests.

Red Shirts rule out talks, block military train

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's "Red Shirt" protesters yesterday ruled out talks with the government, despite a looming crackdown that has prompted them to fortify their rally base with home-made barricades.

Jatuporn Prompan, a leader of the anti-government campaigners who are pushing for fresh elections, said talks were "out of the question" after street clashes in Bangkok earlier this month that left 25 people dead.

"It's impossible to hold negotiations between killers and those who have been killed," he said.

Entrances to the vast Reds encampment, which has engulfed Bangkok's upscale retail district, were blocked with barriers made from bamboo poles and car tyres draped with plastic sheeting.

Meanwhile, in Thailand's northeast, the heartland of the anti-government movement that erupted among the rural poor, a thousand protesters on Wednesday halted a military train carrying soldiers, heavy equipment and weapons.

Railway officials said the Reds mistakenly believed the soldiers and equipment were destined to be used in the Bangkok crackdown, but that they were actually headed for Thailand's south where a separatist insurgency is raging.

AL men attack BNP rally

FROM PAGE 16

BNP Vice President of ward No 40 Mizanur Rahman told UNB that assistant secretary of ward AK Azad was injured in the attack and was later taken away by attackers. His whereabouts was not known till 4:30pm.

BNP Standing Committee Member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain was scheduled to join the demonstration at Rajabazar but he could not reach the venue.

Stick wielding police dispersed the demonstrators and took away the microphone.

Officer in charge of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar thana Riaz Hossain told UNB that a group of people of Rajabazar informed

them that there is no crisis of electricity, gas and water in their area and hence they do not want any demonstration.

They demanded to stop the demonstration or they will do it themselves. A police contingent was rushed to the spot to avert the clash, the officer added.

Asked about taking away the microphone he said the organisers of demonstration did not take prior permission for holding rally there.

Activists of the ruling Awami League and its front organisations BCL and Jubo League brought out processions and paraded different lanes in Rajabazar area chanting slogans against BNP.

Some leaders and workers of BNP rushed to the Al Rajee Hospital from where a procession was brought out to protest the attack on peaceful demonstration. The procession paraded through the areas chanting anti-government slogans.

Meanwhile, the opposition BNP yesterday asked the government to immediately resolve the crises including of water, electricity and gas, otherwise it will wage out-governments movement and demand mid-term election.

Addressing a pre-procession gathering in Lalbag Balurmath area of the city this afternoon, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said the government has totally failed to resolve the crises in all sectors that the people are facing across the country. The people have come down onto the streets to protest the government's failure, he added.

The demonstrations were also held in the other parts of the city and led by BNP leaders Mirza Abbas at Kamalapur railway station, Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah at Demra Sarulia Bazar, Sadeq Hossain Khoka at Badda Hossain Market, Zainul Abidin Farroque at Sutrapur and Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal near Mohammadpur BRTC bus stand.

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