

Pakistan issues arrest warrant for Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani anti-terrorism court yesterday issued an arrest warrant for former president Pervez Musharraf over the assassination of ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto, a public prosecutor said.

Musharraf, who was president when Bhutto was killed in December 2007 in a gun and suicide bomb attack, is in self-imposed exile in London. He will not be going back to Pakistan for any court hearing, his spokesman said.

The former president and military ruler is alleged to have been part of a "broad conspiracy" to have his political rival killed before elections, though the exact nature of the charges against him was not immediately clear.

"Judge Rana Nisar Ahmad has issued non-bailable warrant for former President Pervez Musharraf and directed him to appear before the court on February 19," special prosecutor Chaudhry Zulfiqar Ali told AFP.



He said that "a joint investigation team that had been formed to probe the assassination said in its report Musharraf had involvement in the case and was equally responsible".

"The report said it was a broad conspiracy involving Pervez Musharraf, two police officials and terrorists," Ali said after the closed-door hearing that took place in Rawalpindi's Adiala prison.

Asked what would happen if Musharraf did not appear in court, the prosecutor said: "We will see when the time comes."

But Musharraf's spokesman in London told AFP that the former president would not comply with the warrant.

"No, he won't be going back for this hearing," Fawad Chaudhry said, adding that the warrant was "totally ridiculous".

Chaudhry ridiculed Pakistani accusations that Musharraf failed to provide adequate security for Bhutto.

"How can the president of a country be made responsible for the non-provision of security? It's totally ridiculous, you cannot pin criminal responsibility on a president for that," Chaudhry said.

He insisted that Musharraf still planned to go back to Pakistan eventually to contest elections, adding: "His return to Pakistan will be a political decision."

Bhutto was killed after addressing an election campaign rally in the garrison city, near the capital Islamabad, on December 27, 2007.

Suicide blast kills 30 in Iraq

AFP, Samarra

A suicide bomber blew himself up inside a bus filled with Shiite pilgrims returning from mourning rituals in the Iraqi city of Samarra yesterday, killing at least 30 people, hospital sources said.

"The suicide bomber quickly ran into the bus when it stopped at a checkpoint several kilometres (miles) outside Samarra, and detonated his vest inside the vehicle," a police official said.

"The latest death toll is 30 wounded, among them two women, and 28 wounded, among them also two women," said a medical source at Samarra General Hospital.

"All of the victims inside the bus were Iraqi pilgrims, and casualties included people outside the bus as well," said an ambulance driver who ferried the victims to hospital.

It was the deadliest single attack in Iraq since a January 27 car bomb ripped through a funeral ceremony in a Shiite district of Baghdad, killing 48 people.

Samarra, 110 kilometres (70 miles) north of Baghdad, houses the gold-domed shrine of revered ninth century imam Hassan al-Askari which draws pilgrims from Iraq and round the world.

Yesterday marked the annual commemoration of his death.

A car bomb ripped through a procession of pilgrims heading for the shrine on Thursday on the outskirts of the town of Dujail farther south, killing at least nine pilgrims and wounding 39, a provincial spokesman said.

NEWS IN brief

Palestinian Authority to hold election, official says

REUTERS, Ramallah

President Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority will hold presidential and legislative elections before September, a senior Palestinian official said yesterday.

"The Palestinian leadership decided to hold presidential and legislative elections before September," senior Abbas aide Yasser Abed Rabbo told reporters. "It urges all the sides to put their differences aside," he said, referring to a bitter rivalry between Abbas's West Bank-based government and Hamas, the Islamist

Taliban attack on Afghan police HQ kills 19

AFP, Kandahar

Nineteen people, including 15 police and an intelligence agent, died yesterday in a string of devastating attacks in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar claimed by the Taliban.

The attacks, which played out over several hours and left 49 people wounded, involved several suicide bombers armed with guns and grenades firing on the main police headquarters after occupying a wedding hall opposite.

Powerful quake rocks Chile year after disaster

AFP, Santiago

A powerful earthquake struck Friday off the coast of Chile, throwing a scare into residents nearly a year after a massive temblor and tsunami wreaked death and destruction in the same region.

The strong quake was followed within hours by several aftershocks and two more big temblors with magnitudes of 5.9 and 6.1 in the same area, the US Geological Survey said.

There were no initial reports of casualties or

US asks Pakistan to free detained official again

AFP, Lahore

The United States on Friday renewed demands for Pakistan to immediately release a detained American official who Washington says acted in self defence when he shot dead two men.

The latest US call came hours after Pakistani police rejected the self-defence claim of Raymond Davis, who shot dead two men in broad daylight, and accused him of cold-blooded murder as a court

Mode of execution

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of the eighth amendment passed in 1988.

The rationale behind the decision then was that the article had been restored automatically after the verdict.

Briefing journalists after Wednesday's meeting, Suranjit Sengupta, co-chair of the committee, said the articles amended or repealed by the first martial law regime will not be considered part of the constitution again until or unless parliament passes a bill reinstating them.

But the committee's decision has led to question if parliament will now have to pass a bill also to reinstate article 100, which upholds the unitary character of the Supreme Court.

The eighth amendment act had destroyed the unitary character of the apex court by providing for setting up permanent High Court benches outside the capital.

"Now the question is whether article 100 will remain a case law," said Suranjit adding that the special committee will discuss the issue and fix its next course of action.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said that since parliament is considering amending the constitution in the light of the SC verdict on the fifth amendment, it should also take into consideration the verdict on the eighth amendment.

"Changing the constitution through a mere reprint will create legal complications. So, amendment by parliament is the proper way," he noted, talking to The Daily Star.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed, however, said article 100 was restored 20 years ago following the SC verdict, and so the matter should be left as it is.

The SC in 1989 scrapped the change made to the article, but left intact the other parts of the eighth amendment that made Islam the state religion.

The government then had only reprinted the constitution restoring original article 100. At that time, parliament did nothing about reinstating the article.

Meantime, the High Court has declared illegal the seventh amendment act that ratified and validated activities of the second martial law regime, which was led by General HM Ershad.

Asked whether parliament will need to do anything if the seventh amendment is declared illegal by the Appellate Division as well, Suranjit said, "The matter is still pending with the Appellate Division. We will see to it once the top court gives its decision."

Shahdeen Malik said parliament should take necessary steps after the Appellate Division delivers the verdict.

The law minister, however, said the court's decision will be final, and parliament will not have to do anything.

Come Falgun, come

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the floral and therefore the melodious. We speak of Pahela Falgun, of Bhashanta, of that celebration of life which has consistently fortified our belief in the beauty of life, in its resilience.

It is Pahela Falgun today. It is that time of year when the heart and the soul of this land come together to inform us that it is that precious moment when nature is pregnant with festivity. There is a pristine charm which comes into the beauty of women as they reach for blossoms to place on their hair and garlands to rest around the necks. Colour, a diversity of it in all its myriad dimensions, is all. Saris drenched in yellow, in orange, in what you would call bashanti, border themselves in red before coiling themselves around an abundance of feminine beauty. If that is how the Bengali belle rings in Falgun, the Bengali man, be he in his youth or dotage, will not remain behind. His raiment speaks of

the turn in the seasons. His laughter, his sense of romance, his taking in of the life force from the environment around him --- these are the elements that revive the poetry in him. On Pahela Falgun, for the people of this country, an explosion of colours and a breaking of new ground in the landscape of poetry are the defining spirit of the new times that are upon them.

Glory underlies the arrival of Falgun and not just in the sense of the natural. For Falgun, coming in tandem with February, is also a time to remember. It was in Falgun that the shedding of young Bengali blood added to the diversity of colours. Crimson, besides being a recalling of a sudden, cruel end, is also a reminder of life born anew, borne forth on the wings of history. In Bhashanta, in the serenity of four ageless spring, aspring comes into our steps.

'Spring has returned. The earth is like a child that knows poems', sang the poet long ago.

We murmur that song, in good cheer, this morning.

Brac Bank comes

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borrowed Tk 40,000 to arrange her treatment, burial and other relevant expenses such as food and conveyance, the report mentioned quoting family members.

"This, we believe, is the least we could do as a socially responsible, human bank," reads a statement sent by the bank Friday.

It also stated that the family did not take any loan from the bank. Quoting family members, The Daily Star had mentioned that the family took Tk 10,000 loan from Brac Bank on condition to repay in 46 weeks at a rate of Tk 250 a week.

When contacted again, the family corrected the information, saying the loan was actually taken from Brac micro-credit programme at Bijari in Shariatpur. The micro financier yesterday wrote off the loan as a gesture of support for the grieving family.

[The Daily Star regrets the error in report and thanks Brac Bank and Brac micro-credit programme for the gesture]

ACCUSED IDRIS REMANDED

A correspondent from Shariatpur reports: Idris Ali Sheikh, one of the main organisers of the fatwa (religious edict) that ordered to whip Hena Akter, was remanded yesterday by a Shariatpur court.

The Criminal Investigation Department sought a seven-day remand after producing him at Shariatpur Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court and Senior Judicial Magistrate Ashok Kumar Dutta granted remand for five days.

Hena, 15, was whipped following a fatwa on January 24 for allegedly having an affair with her married cousin Mahub while her family kept on insisting that she had actually been raped by the man. She died on January 31.

Aklima Begum, mother of the deceased, filed a fresh case Friday night with Naria Police Station accusing 18 people in connection with Hena's death.


Sub-Inspector Kamal Hossain has been investigating the case.

Unity all around

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politics in Pakistan. What followed was an all-party meeting to study possible responses to the prime minister's provocative remarks on the language question. The meeting, held on January 31, was presided over by Maulana Bhashani, president of the Awami Muslim League, and attended by representatives of a large number of organisations, among which were the Youth League, All East Pakistan Students League, Dhaka University State Language Action Committee, Tamaddun Majlis, Islamic Brotherhood, East Pakistan Students Muslim League and East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.

A good number of political personalities, including Abul Hashim, Hamidul Haq Chowdhury, Shamsul Haq and Khaleque Nawaz Khan chastised the prime minister and the government of Pakistan over their attitude to the Bangla language issue. The upshot of the meeting was the formation of a 40-member strong body to be known as the All Party State Language Committee of Action. Kazi Golam Mahub, general secretary of the East Pakistan Students League, was named convener of the committee. A good number of resolutions were adopted at the meeting. Total support was voiced for the strike scheduled for February 4. Attempts to have Bangla written in the Arabic script were strongly condemned and demands were made for the release of all political prisoners. Among the prisoners was a young, fast rising politician named Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

On the day of the strike, February 4, 1952, a huge number of students gathered at Dhaka University. The meeting, presided over by Gaziul Haq, commenced at 11:00 in the morning. A good length of time was expended on the subject of whether a demonstration needed to be brought out in the city. At one point Abdul Matin, convener of the Dhaka University State Language Committee, asked the students if they were in favour of a demonstration. The response was a resounding 'Yes', which was soon followed by a procession that passed by the official homes of the vice chancellor and the chief minister. The strike on February 4 was observed not only in educational institutions in Dhaka but also in those in such towns as Chittagong, Mymensingh, Comilla and Narayanganj. On the same day, a students' meeting at Dhaka University, clearly encouraged by the response to the strike, decided that a general strike would be observed throughout East Bengal on February 21, 1952.



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