

CONTEMPT CHARGES

Pak PM gets 3-week reprieve

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf yesterday won a few more weeks' breathing space in a long-running legal wrangle over the reopening of graft cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

The Supreme Court ordered Ashraf in July to comply with an order to write to authorities in Switzerland asking them to reopen multimillion dollar corruption probes investigating the president.

Ashraf's predecessor, Yousuf Raza Gilani, was thrown out of office for refusing to write to the Swiss and the court has made veiled threats that the new premier could suffer the same fate.

The court had given Ashraf until August 8 to indicate whether he would write to the Swiss before adjourning the case to try to find a way out of the saga, which has dragged on for two and a half years.

On Monday Judge Asif Saeed Khosa adjourned the case again, to September 18, after Ashraf pledged to find a way to resolve the standoff.

The government has resisted judges' demands to reopen investigations into Zardari, arguing he enjoys immunity as head of state.

Earlier this month the Supreme Court struck down a new law passed by parliament that sought to exempt



Raja Pervez Ashraf

members of the government from contempt trials, clearing the way for legal proceedings against the premier.

The showdown could force elections before February 2013 when the government would otherwise become the first in Pakistan's history to complete an elected, full five-year mandate.

During a 45-minute address to the court, the prime minister said he was determined to find a way to bring an end to a chapter that has caused turmoil in Pakistani politics.

"I will make all out efforts to bring an end to uncertainty that prevailed in the country," he said.

"It is my firm belief that it is not in Pakistan's interest to linger on this issue. I am ready to give a positive commitment to this court that I will resolve this issue."

Government lawyers last month said the court's order to write to the Swiss was "un-implementable" as it ran contrary to the constitution, which grants immunity to Zardari against trial in any court while he is president.

Critics of the judiciary and members of Zardari's main ruling Pakistan People's Party accuse the court of overstepping its reach and waging a personal vendetta against the president.

Experts say that if Ashraf does not satisfy the court, he risks being indicted for contempt, precipitating the second trial against a sitting prime minister in months.

Strike paralyses Assam

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Normal life was paralysed in northeastern state of Assam yesterday by a 12-hour general strike called by a right wing Hindu group to protest the ethnic violence even as the situation strife-hit areas was reported calm with no fresh incident reported.

Enforcers of the strike called by Bajrang Dal set on fire tyres and pelted stones at vehicles in different parts of the state, after which the police took nearly 500 of them into preventive custody in Guwahati, Golokgunj and Agomoni in Dhubri, reports reaching here said quoting official sources said.

Schools, colleges and educational institutions, business establishments, financial institutions were closed and attendance in government offices was thin, the sources said.

Opposition groups draft post-Assad roadmap

Rebels down copter; Assad slams anti-Syria plot

AFP, Damascus

Syrian opposition activists have drafted a political roadmap after a possible ouster of President Bashar al-Assad, drawing on examples from other states that moved to democracy such as South Africa.

The working group, which brought together a broad spectrum of political organisations and religious faiths, produced a report called "The Day after Project: Supporting a Democratic Transition in Syria".

In a copy of the document obtained by AFP, the drafters said they saw their recommendations as a "starting point" for discussion on how to achieve stability, security and the rule of law after a fall of Assad.

The project was initiated by the Washington-based United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in partnership with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin and developed by about 45 Syrians.

The document, the first of its kind from the Syrian opposition, offers recommendations for writing a new constitution and principles for institution building, and cites

South Africa's post-apartheid transition as potentially "instructive".

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said on Sunday the foreign "conspiracy" against his country would be defeated after the "massacre" of over 330 people in the town of Daraya.

And rebels claimed they shot down an army helicopter during fierce fighting in Damascus yesterday, saying it was to avenge the massacre.

State television said the aircraft crashed near a mosque in the eastern district of Qaboon, where activists reported shelling, heavy fire by combat helicopters and clashes between government troops and Free Syrian Army rebels.

"The Syrian people will not allow this conspiracy to achieve its objectives" and will defeat it "at any price," Assad said during a meeting in Damascus with a top official from Iran, Syria's chief regional ally.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 320 people were killed in a five-day onslaught on Daraya, a satellite town southwest of the capital, by troops battling to crush insurgents.

MYANMAR UNREST

3 UN workers jailed

AFP, Yangon

A court in Myanmar yesterday sentenced three local United Nations staff to prison for participating in recent sectarian unrest, a government official said.

Two UN Refugee Agency workers were sentenced to six years and three years each on Friday by a court in western Rakhine state on charges including arson and inciting violence, while a World Food Programme employee received a two-year term.

"They could be released under a presidential pardon," the official said, adding that one of them was a Buddhist and the others Muslims.

Five other UN workers detained over their alleged roles in the violence were freed in mid-August without



PHOTO: AFP

Greenpeace activists on August 25 holding a banner in front of the Gazprom 'Prirazlomnaya' oil drilling platform during their protest in the Barents Sea as the Gazprom support boat secures the area. The banner display took place after a team of 6 Greenpeace activists, including Executive Director of Greenpeace International Kumi Naidoo, spent 15 hours on board Gazprom's giant Arctic oil drilling platform off the North-eastern coast of Russia in the Pechora Sea, the south-eastern part of the Barents sea.

5 shot dead in Baluchistan

AFP, Quetta

Gunmen shot dead five people in attacks on two buses as rebels in Pakistan's troubled province of Baluchistan staged a strike to mark the anniversary of a tribal leader's death, officials said yesterday.

There was a "complete strike" in provincial capital Quetta and several other districts on Sunday, local police chief Wazir Khan told AFP with shops and markets closed and traffic brought to a standstill.

The halt was called by Baluchistan Republican Party (BRP) leader Brahmdagh Bugti to mark the sixth anniversary of the death of his grandfather Akbar Bugti, a rebel chieftain killed in his mountain hide-out during a military operation in 2006.

Taliban behead 17 party-goers

10 Afghan soldiers, 2 Nato troops die in attacks

AFP, Kandahar

Taliban Islamist insurgents beheaded 17 party-goers, 10 Afghan soldiers were killed and two Nato troops shot dead in a new insider attack in a bloody day across Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

The Taliban were responsible for beheading the civilians, including two women, who were holding a party with music in a southern Afghanistan village, officials said.

"I can confirm that this is the work of the Taliban," the Helmand provincial governor's spokesman Daud Ahmadi told AFP. "Two women and 15 men were beheaded. They were partying with music in an area under the control of the Taliban."

The hardliners were notorious during their rule for public executions and the suppression of music and parties.

Nematullah Khan, the Musa Qala district chief, confirmed that the villagers had organised a party with music, and a local official said he suspected that the two women had been dancing.

Secret parties with dancing women from a gypsy-type tribe are common across southern Afghanistan.

Haji Musa Khan, a tribal elder in Musa Qala district, said the region had seen a surge in such killings in recent months.

Khan said the killings followed major military operations by Afghan and Nato troops in the area.

Hours after the beheadings, Taliban insurgents overran an Afghan army post in the same province in a pre-dawn attack on Monday, killing 10 troops, authorities said.

Four soldiers were wounded and six others were missing following the attack in Helmand's Washir district, senior regional police officer Colonel Mohammad Ismael Hotak told AFP.

If it is confirmed that the attack was facilitated by soldiers it will mark a new escalation in a string of insider attacks on Afghan and Nato security forces.

Two Nato soldiers were killed Monday when an Afghan army soldier turned his weapon against them in a "green-on-blue" attack in eastern Laghman province, the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said.

"ISAF soldiers returned fire and killed the attacker," ISAF said.

PM flies to Tehran tomorrow

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isolate it from the rest of the world.

Sheikh Hasina will lead a 45-member delegation to the summit which will be the single largest gathering of world leaders in recent history.

More than 50 heads of state and government, including UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, North Korea's Kim Jong Un, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari, and Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi, the first Egyptian leader to visit Iran since 1979.

Foreign ministry officials said Sheikh Hasina will avail the opportunity of the NAM platform to express her views on a number of global political and economic issues.

On the sidelines of the

summit, Hasina will also hold a number of bilateral meetings with leaders of various countries, including Iran, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Turkmenistan to discuss issues of mutual interest.

At the NAM Ministerial Committee on Palestine scheduled for today, Dhaka will make a policy statement. Bangladesh has been its member for the last three years and plays a leading role in support of the Palestinian issue.

At the summit, Bangladesh will highlight its position on a wide range of issues, including Syria, Palestine, UN reforms, peace-building, climate change, migration, development, global food security, and special economic and trade concession needs of the least developed countries (LDC).

Foreign Minister Dipu

Moni, who left for the summit yesterday, will participate in a two-day Ministerial Interactive General Debate on the theme "Lasting Peace through Joint Global Governance".

Issues like regional crises, human rights, food and health security, solidarity of NAM, global peace as well as economic cooperation and development among the 120-member states will be raised at the discussion, officials said.

The summit will adopt "The Tehran Declaration" which may seriously oppose unilateral economic sanctions enacted by certain countries against the Non-Aligned nations.

According to the programme schedule, the Prime Minister will leave Dhaka tomorrow at 10:30am and return on September 1.

Mutineers wanted PM to come to Pilkhana

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"Being ordered, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak and I went near Pilkhana headquarters around 1:30pm, putting our lives at risk. We tried to convince the mutineers to sit in a discussion, but they threatened to kill us and refused to sit with us," said Azam.

"No one will be spared if the prime minister doesn't come here," he said quoting the jawans as saying.

The rebels said they always fight at the border and are more powerful than the armed forces. They claimed to have contacted with their border outposts to paralyse the border area, added the whip.

Narrating his dreadful experience Azam said Nanak over the phone on February 25 had asked him to go to prime minister's residence Jamuna around

10:00am.

"As we reached Jamuna, the prime minister asked Nanak and me to go to Pilkhana and give a try to hold a meeting with the mutineers around 1:00pm. We were asked to find a peaceful solution to the crisis through negotiations," he told the court.

The two lawmakers reached Ambala Guest House near the BDR gate at Jigatola around 2:00pm. A tense situation was prevailing in the area with sound of gunshots coming from inside the BDR (now Border Guard Bangladesh) headquarters. They collected a megaphone from police and through it urged the mutineers to stop firing before heading slowly for the main gate.

"But in response the jawans fired shots and hurled abuse at us. We were scared and returned to our previous position. In the meantime the DGFI chief, deputy chief, Rab

director general and high officials of police reached there," said Azam.

Then Azam collected a loudspeaker and announced the prime minister's message to surrender. It prompted the BDR soldiers stop firing for a while.

"I announced my cell phone number over the loudspeaker and urged them to contact me. A little later the jawans responded and agreed to discuss," he mentioned.

"As we walked towards the Pilkhana gate waving a white flag, a team of BDR came there and called us for talks. Some soldiers had wrapped their mouths with cloths."

The jawans were complaining that the DG of BDR misbehaved with them, officers tortured them, and also skimmed off the Dal-Bhat programme.

They also claimed that

the officers get higher salaries, though the soldiers have to work harder. The rebels vowed to keep fighting until the government resolved the discriminations, said Azam.

Later Nanak and Azam took a 14-member delegation of the mutineers to Jamuna around 4:15pm. Their names were not enrolled in the registration book of the prime minister's residence as the jawans did not say their names.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had asked them about the condition of the DG and other army officials in Pilkhana. In reply, the team said all of them were safe.

The soldiers placed some demands before the premier and vowed to free the officials after their demands were met.

"In and outside of Jamuna, every time we tried to know about the captive

officers and their family members, the mutineers either avoided or provided false information," said Azam.

The BDR team returned to their headquarters along with Nanak and Azam around 6:30pm.

The delegation with some new members had sat with the government delegation at Hotel Ambala for a fresh round of negotiations.

The following day when the government delegation entered the Pilkhana headquarters, they found a horrible scene there.

"Almost in every house, especially the DG's, we saw spots of blood. We rescued around six persons including Major Monir from the medical centre," noted Azam.

Later the defence lawyer cross-examined the whip.

Seventy-four people including 57 army officers were killed and at least 200

One suspect arrested

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to take him into their custody as Rab tried to hand him over to them on Sunday night, saying he was not connected with the killing.

Kamal, 30, son of Shamsul Alam and a resident of East Rajabazar in the capital's Tejgaon, was later sent to Banani Police Station. The Daily Star could not collect details about him.

"Rab detained the wrong Kamal and brought him to us around 9:00pm on Sunday. But we did not receive him as we didn't find his involvement with the murder," Mollah Nazrul Islam, deputy commissioner of DB, told The Daily Star last night.

"We returned him to Rab the same night."

Bangladesh Medical Association leader Dr Nitai was stabbed to death at his National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital quarters in the capital's Mohakhali early on

Thursday.

In this connection, police have arrested four suspects - Peda Mashud, 25, Saidul, 37, Pichhi Kalam, 26, and Faisal, 30, -- from the capital's Mohakhali and Kamrangirchar area. All of them are on a five-day remand each.

The detectives claimed the suspects murdered the physician as he tried to resist a burglary.

The DB produced the four arrestees before newsmen at the Media and Community Centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police on Saturday afternoon.

Detained Mashud said there were seven in the group that included one Kamal.

Major Mostaq Ahmed, commander of Rab-1, told The Daily Star that "we suspected he was involved with the murder."

Bhuiyan Mahbub Hasan,

officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station, told The Daily Star that Rab had handed over Kamal Hossain to them early yesterday.

Police had produced the man before a court after showing him arrested for roaming around suspiciously, he said.

Gunmen kill Iraqi general

AFP, Baghdad

Gunmen shot dead an Iraqi border forces brigadier general yesterday, among two people killed and five wounded in nationwide violence, security and medical officials said.

Brigadier General Abdul Hussein Mohsen was gunned down by several armed men while he was in the town of Taji, just north of Baghdad, an interior ministry official said.