



Sharif picks Ishaq Dar as new finance minister

Pak stocks hit high

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan election-winner Nawaz Sharif has picked a veteran finance minister to serve in his cabinet as Karachi stocks hit an all-time high yesterday over hopes his pro-business agenda can revive the economy.

Sharif, who has sought to present himself as a pragmatist who can do business with the United States and improve relations with nuclear rival India, won a resounding victory in Saturday's landmark polls.

Ishaq Dar, who served as finance minister in Sharif's second administration and again briefly in 2008, would return to the job, PML-N spokesman Siddiqui Farooq the said.

Dar had "all the facts and figures at his fingertips" and will in June present the budget for the next financial year starting on July 1, Farooq said.

In Karachi the benchmark index of top 100 shares rose 1.6 percent to 20,232 points in early trade, surpassing the 20,000 mark for the first time as the election results defied analysts' predictions of a weak parliament.

Investors are hopeful of an economic revival under Sharif, whose privatisation policies earned him a good reputation among traders and industrialists during his two previous tenures in the 1990s.

ODDLY enough

China pupil held for hiring hitmen to kill father, sister

AFP, Beijing

A school pupil was arrested in China for hiring hitmen who killed his father and sister because of the pressure they put on him to study, reports said yesterday, highlighting educational stress in the country.

The teenager was detained in the central province of Henan following the death of his father Gao Tianfeng -- a senior court official -- and his 20-year-old sister, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing local police.

Police could not be reached for comment by AFP Monday.

Hong Kong transsexual wins right to wed

AFP, Hong Kong

A transsexual woman won a groundbreaking court appeal in Hong Kong yesterday allowing her to marry her boyfriend and forcing the government to re-write the city's marriage laws.

The woman in her 30s, known in the Court of Final Appeal as "W" under anonymity rules, successfully overturned earlier verdicts that said marriage is only allowed between couples who were of the opposite sex at birth.

Pak vote step forward, but irregularities: EU

Over 150 killed in poll violence

AFP, Islamabad

High turnout in Pakistan's landmark election was a positive step for democracy despite the fact the campaign was marred by violence and irregularities, an EU observer mission said yesterday.

Violence in the run-up to polls and on election day itself killed over 150 people, according to an AFP tally, as the Taliban set their sights in particular on secular parties that made up the outgoing government.

Saturday's vote was the first time a civilian government has handed over power to another in a country that has been ruled by the military for half its life.

Violence during the campaign and on election day had been "terrible, but must not overshadow the achievements of the process", MEP Richard Howitt told a news conference in Islamabad.

"The turnout in defiance of the threats against the process was an extraordinary vote of confidence in democracy itself.

"This election was a step forward, but one from which we call on all those elected to sustain their commitment to reforms, in the interests of good government for the people and governance for the state," he said.

Michael Gahler, chief of the mission, congratulated Pakistan's election commission for making improvements to its election law and improving its voter roll, as well as ordering re-polling in a contested seat in Karachi.

But the mission said "women and vulnerable groups" were persistently under-represented" despite nearly three times the number of women candidates and a higher women's turnout than at the last polls in 2008.

Observers said voting procedures were mostly followed and that in a "vast majority" of stations all essential material was present, but classified nine percent of stations visited as "poor or inadequate".

But the mission did not go at all to the southwestern, insurgency-torn province of Baluchistan or the semi-autonomous tribal belt on the Afghan border where the Taliban and al-Qaeda have strongholds

It also only "undertook limited observation" in Karachi, where the mission said observers saw "some serious problems in polling and were also restricted in their activities".

Karachi was the focus of most complaints reported by rival political parties.

IRANIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION Ahmadinejad may face charges over appearance

REUTERS, Dubai

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad may face charges for accompanying his former chief of staff to register for June's presidential vote, the country's electoral watchdog said.

Iran's electoral law forbids the use of state resources on behalf of or against any candidate, and bans individuals from supporting candidates in an official capacity.

Abbas Ali Kadkhodai, a spokesman for the Guardian Council, said the council's supervisory board unanimously agreed "the...actions of the president in introducing an individual as an election candidate constituted a violation and were criminal," according to Khabaronline, an Iranian news site.

"We reported the facts to the judiciary," Kadkhodai said. The Guardian Council, a body of clerics and jurists, vets all candidates for elections.

Ahmadinejad is banned on constitutional grounds from running in the June 14 presidential poll, the first since 2009, when protests erupted over his disputed win against reformist rivals.

He accompanied Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie on Saturday to register at the interior ministry. Photographs in the Iranian media showed them gripping hands and making peace signs.

According to the Mehr news agency, Kadkhodai said election violations could affect the Guardian Council's vetting process, suggesting Mashaie's candidacy could be under threat.



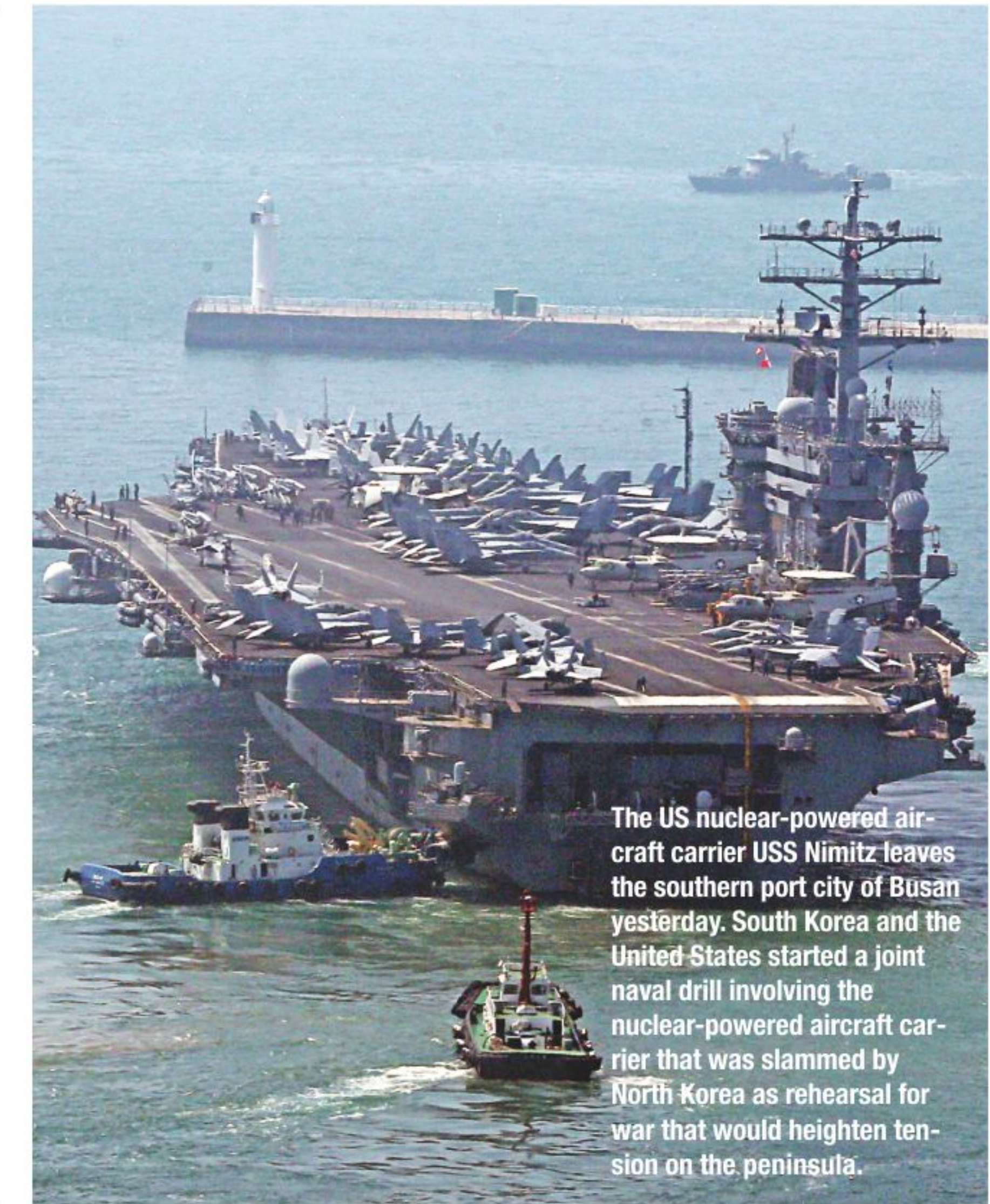
Cameron moves to quell revolt over EU

REUTERS, Washington

British Prime Minister David Cameron moved to end a revolt over European Union membership in his ruling Conservative party yesterday, saying all his ministers backed his strategy on the issue despite two expressing more sceptical views than his own.

Cameron, who heads a two-party coalition, has promised to try to renegotiate Britain's membership of the EU if he wins an election in 2015 and then call a referendum to decide whether his country remains a member of the bloc.

He cannot act now because his junior coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, oppose such a move.



The US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz leaves the southern port city of Busan yesterday. South Korea and the United States started a joint naval drill involving the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier that was slammed by North Korea as rehearsal for war that would heighten tension on the peninsula.

PHOTO: AFP

Cameron in US for Syria talks with Obama

Israeli PM, Putin to meet tomorrow for talks; Turkey bombings toll rises to 48

AFP, Washington

British Prime Minister David Cameron hailed a "real breakthrough" in diplomatic efforts to end the civil war in Syria, as he arrived at the White House yesterday for talks with US President Barack Obama.

Cameron, fresh from a trip to Russia, one of President Bashar al-Assad's few remaining backers, said US pressure that had convinced Moscow to join a conference on a political transition in Syria was a significant step forward.

He told National Public Radio that Secretary of State John Kerry made a "real breakthrough" in talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin "when they agreed to an American-Russia peace conference."

The British leader also said that Putin was "keen now to move from the generalities of having a peace conference to talking through the specifics of how we can make (this) work."

"There are still big hurdles to overcome ... but I sense there is an understanding now



that the current trajectory of Syria ... this is not in anybody's interest."

Cameron and Obama were due to have 75 minutes of talks in the Oval Office before holding a joint press conference at 15:15 GMT.

Cameron and Obama met amid indications that Assad's regime may not be rushed out of power quickly, as the army gained ground in the strategic central province of Homs.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is to hold talks on Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the conflict in Syria, the Kremlin said, amid concerns Moscow plans to deliver advanced missiles to the Damascus regime.

"During the meeting an exchange of opinion is planned on key aspects of bilateral ties," the Kremlin said in a statement.

Turkey recovered on Monday the bodies of two more people killed in the twin bombings near the Syrian border town of Reyhanli, pushing up the death toll to 48 as many others remained missing.

US Mother's Day shooting hurt 19

Police search for suspect

AFP, Washington

Unknown gunmen opened fire at a Mother's Day parade in New Orleans Sunday, wounding 19 people in an incident the FBI attributed to "street violence."

Those wounded when gunfire erupted in the early afternoon attack included 17 adults and two 10-year-olds, the local police department said in a statement.

"Many of the victims were grazed (some by bullets that ricocheted)," it said. "At this point, there are no fatalities, and most of the wounds are not life-threatening."

The injured children -- a boy and a girl -- suffered graze wounds and were in good condition while a man and a woman were still in surgery late Sunday.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation said the shooting was unrelated to terrorism.

"From all of our intelligence, we have no reason to believe it was an act of terror, just

street violence," Mary Beth Romig, a spokeswoman for the FBI in New Orleans, told AFP. But "certainly today was not a normal day in New Orleans."

The incident comes less than a month after twin bomb blasts at the Boston Marathon killed three people and wounded more than 260. In December, a gunman opened fire at an elementary school in Connecticut, killing 20 children and six staff members.

New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Ronal Serpas told reporters that shots from "maybe two different types of weapons" rang out, and that police saw three people running away immediately after the shooting.

"It appears that these two or three people just for a reason unknown to us, started shooting at, toward, or in the crowd," Serpas said. "It was over in just a couple seconds."

INDIA STATE POLL Siddaramaiah sworn in as Karnataka CM

IANS, Bangalore

Karnataka Governor H R Bhardwaj yesterday swore in Siddaramaiah as the 28th chief minister of the state at the sprawling Kaneetarava stadium in the city centre.

About 50,000 people, including family members and relatives of the 64-year-old Siddaramaiah, were present at the grand swearing-in ceremony that was marked by cheers, applause, patriotic fervour, music and folk dances under a cloudy sky and breezy weather.

Siddaramaiah took oath in the name of truth and the constitution after Bhardwaj prompted him in Kannada at 11.40 a.m. as the stadium reverberated in thunderous noise and witnessed boisterous scenes.



PHOTO: NBCNEWS.COM

SERIES OF BOMBINGS IN FRENCH TRAINS Venezuela's Carlos back in court to appeal conviction

AFP, Paris

Notorious Venezuelan militant Carlos the Jackal returned to court in Paris yesterday to appeal his conviction for a series of deadly bombings in France 30 years ago.

The trial kicked off with Carlos, whose real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, appearing without his defence lawyers and saying he had asked them not to attend.

The 63-year-old, who has been imprisoned in France since his capture in Sudan in 1994, was found guilty in 2011 of masterminding the 1982 and 1983 attacks on two French passenger trains, a train station in Marseille and a Libyan magazine office in Paris.

Already serving life for murder at the time, Carlos was given another life sentence for his role in attacks that left 11 people dead and nearly 150 injured, earning him the mantle of the world's most wanted fugitive.

The 1982-83 bombings in France were widely believed to have been carried out in retaliation for France's detention of two fellow members of a militant group Carlos ran with the support of East Germany's notorious secret police, the Stasi.

NEWSIN brief

Musharraf party wins 2 seats

AFP, Islamabad

Supporters of Pakistan's former military ruler Pervez Musharraf won two seats in the northwestern district of Chitral after flouting a party boycott of landmark elections, official results showed yesterday.

The Pakistan election commission announced on its website that Iftikhar Uddin won Chitral's only seat in the national assembly and Haji Ghulam Muhammad gained its sole seat in the provincial assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Both contested on behalf of the All Pakistan League Party (APML), which Musharraf founded in exile before he returned home and was put under house arrest, barred from contesting the elections in person.

Suicide bomb kills 6 in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

The police chief of Pakistan's restive southwestern province of Baluchistan narrowly escaped a suicide attack Sunday that killed at least six people and wounded 46 others, officials said.

Inspector General Mushtaq Sukhera had just entered his residence in the provincial capital Quetta when a suicide bomber in a vehicle laden with explosives blew themselves up outside.

"At least two policemen, three paramilitary soldiers and one passer by were killed outside the inspector general's residence and 46 others were wounded," Home Secretary Akbar Durrani told AFP.

A huge amount of explosives were packed into the vehicle and the blast left a deep crater, with the explosion shattering nearby windows and sending debris flying, he said.

Greece uses emergency power on striking teachers

AP, Athens

Greek civil servants' unions called a 24-hour strike for Tuesday in reaction to the government's decision to use emergency powers to prevent protesting teachers from disrupting university entrance exams this month.

It is the third time this year that the conservative-led coalition government has used the emergency civil mobilization order -- a measure normally reserved for natural disasters and other times of national crisis -- to end a labor dispute in the crisis-hit country.

Tuesday's nationwide strike is expected to close schools and disrupt public services. Civil servants' union officials told the AP on Monday that the union was also planning a work stoppage Thursday and a series of public protests.

Afghan roadside bomb kills 10

AFP, Kandahar

A bomb killed 10 civilians including women and children in southern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said, in the latest violence since the Taliban launched their annual "spring offensive".

"The blast hit a pick-up truck in the Arghistan district of Kandahar province, killing four women, three men and three children," Abdul Raziq, Kandahar provincial police chief, told AFP.

Raziq said the victims were travelling to the funeral of two people who were killed by a similar blast a few days ago.



Muslim women show their ink-covered fingers after casting their votes.

Filipinos cast ballots in midterm polls

AFP, Manila

The Philippines held elections Monday seen as crucial for President Benigno Aquino's bold reform agenda, as deadly violence and grafted candidates underlined the nation's deep-rooted problems.

Aquino called for the mid-term polls, in which thousands of local leaders plus national legislators will be elected, to be a referendum on his efforts to transform a corrupt political system and an underperforming economy.

"The president is asking voters to put their confidence in those on the administration slate to help him carry out the rest of his reform agenda," presidential spokeswoman Abigail Valte told AFP.

Aquino swept into power in 2010 on a promise to fight corruption that he blames for crushing poverty in the country of 100 million people.

Opinion polls show he remains one of the country's most popular presidents, with the Philippines enjoying faster economic growth than every other nation in the Asia-Pacific except for China.

But, with presidents only allowed to serve one term of six years, Aquino is in a rush to implement more ambitious reforms and make an enduring impact on graft.