

Prominent Pakistanis let off corruption charges to be named

The names of prominent Pakistanis who have benefited from an ordinance granting immunity to politicians, army officers and bureaucrats charged with corruption will be made public, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said Saturday.

Speaking after receiving the list of names of those who have benefited from the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) from Minister of State for Law Afzal Sindhu, Gilani directed that it be presented to the media to remove any ambiguities about the beneficiaries.

Then president Pervez Musharraf had promulgated the NRO in October 2007. It had enabled the return home from exile of former prime minister Benzair Bhutto and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari.

While Bhutto was assassinated in a gun and bomb attack in the garrison town of Rawalpindi Dec 27, 2007, Zardari is now the president of Pakistan.

The NRO, however, is now in limbo. The Supreme Court had declared it unconstitutional in July and had given parliament till Nov 30 to pass it into law or let it lapse.

However, the opposition created a furore when the government tried to introduce the measure in the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, leading Gilani to declare: 'We will leave it to the courts.'

The government's only option now is to seek a review of the Supreme Court order but the jury's out on what the verdict could be.

Whatever eventually happens to the NRO, Zardari won't be affected for now due to the presidential immunity he enjoys. What happens if and when he leaves office is a different matter.

Among those who have benefited from the NRO are Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Pakistan's Ambassador to the US Hussain Haqqani, politician Fazl-ur Rehman of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam -- a junior partner in the ruling coalition -- and former prime minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali.

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