

Parties resent Pakistan election delay

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan -- Pakistan's main political parties said they weren't formally consulted before the country's election commission decided to postpone this month's elections. The parliamentary elections, scheduled for Jan. 8, have been delayed until Feb. 18 in the aftermath of the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Her Pakistan People's Party and the faction of the Pakistan Muslim League, led by Nawaz Sharif, another former prime minister, had insisted the polls be conducted as scheduled. But Wednesday, when the decision to delay the polls was announced, spokesmen from both parties said there was no consultation as had been announced earlier by election commission officials, CNN reported. Election officials said keeping the Jan. 8 schedule would've been "impossible" because of the damage done by protesters after Bhutto's killing included the burning of ballot papers and ransacking of election offices. The government said the violence resulted in the deaths of 58 people and cause damage estimated at more than \$200 million. The United States welcomed the decision to announce a firm new date for the elections, instead of putting it off indefinitely, CNN reported. A National Security Council spokesman said it was hoped all political parties would "work together to ensure a free and fair election."

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