

Bhutto party says thousands detained

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan -- The party of assassinated leader Benazir Bhutto plans to take part in Pakistan's delayed elections but its leaders say many of its workers are being arrested. The leaders of Pakistan People's Party claim thousands of people have either been arrested or face rioting and arson charges arising from violent protests over the killing of the former prime minister in Rawalpindi a week ago, the BBC reported Thursday. The election commission postponed parliamentary elections, originally set for next week, to Feb. 18, citing damage and disruptions caused by the protests. While criticizing the postponement, the PPP and the other main party, Pakistan Muslim League-N, plan to take part in the polls. The arrests may make matters worse between the party and the government with the approaching elections, which are seen as a crucial step in the move toward democracy under Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, the BBC report said. The provincial government's home minister couldn't confirm the number of those facing charges of riot and arson, the report said. The newspaper Dawn quoted Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari, who is co-chairman of her party, that if the elections are rigged, the government must bear the "consequences," but didn't elaborate. Zardari said it was premature to say if his party would work with Musharraf if it won the elections.

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