

Nepal's talks offer fails to dampen protests

Govt lifts night curfew

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepali riot police clashed with pro-democracy protesters in the capital for a fourth consecutive day yesterday, firing tear gas, using water cannon and employing baton charges to beat back hundreds of demonstrators.

The protests continued despite a government offer to talk to opposition leaders and a partial relaxation of curbs imposed to quash protests against King Gyanendra.

A key opposition leader of Nepal on Monday ruled out unity talks with King Gyanendra to resolve a deepening political crisis and vowed to intensify protests against the monarch who seized absolute power last year.

"There is no possibility of any understanding with the king," said former Prime Minister Girija

Prasad Koirala, in his first comments after being freed late on Sunday from a three-day house arrest.

Koirala was among hundreds of politicians put under house arrest or detained ahead of a mass anti-king rally planned in Kathmandu last week. Party officials said dozens of leaders were yet to be freed.

Political activists and students waved party flags and chanted slogans demanding the king surrender his grip on power and restore democracy in the impoverished Himalayan nation.

"Down with the autocratic monarchy," they chanted. "Long lived democracy."

At least nine people were injured during the baton charge on a normally busy shopping street in central Kathmandu.

On Tuesday, the government

lifted a night curfew and allowed rallies in outlying parts of the capital. It also released key party leaders from house arrest at the weekend, and invited them for talks -- an offer they swiftly rejected.

But the ban on rallies in the heart of Kathmandu remained.

"We have the feeling the security situation has improved," Home Minister Kamal Thapa told reporters early in the day, adding that the restrictions would be reimposed if there was fresh trouble.

Authorities also restored some mobile phone connections late on Monday after cutting them last week.

The curbs were imposed to thwart a pro-democracy rally planned for last Friday and which had been called by an alliance of seven mainstream political parties to protest against Gyanendra's

seizure of power last year.

Thousands of heavily armed police and soldiers took to the streets to prevent the rally, placing political leaders under house arrest.

The political parties have called a general strike for Thursday, when candidates for municipal elections are expected to start filing their nomination papers. The elections are due on Feb. 8.

The mainstream parties are boycotting the polls, which were set by the king without consulting political leaders. Maoist rebels have vowed to stop the elections.

Gyanendra says he was forced to take power to crush an anti-monarchy Maoist insurgency in which more than 12,500 people have died since 1996. But so far he has failed to do so and appears more isolated than ever.



Nepalese protesters scuffle with police during a demonstration in Kathmandu yesterday.

Pak PM warns against arms race in Asia

Set to hold talks with Bush

AFP, Washington

Surrounded by giants India and China and amid concerns over neighbouring Iran's nuclear ambitions, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has warned against an arms race in the region.

"As a nuclear weapons state, we adhere to the doctrine of minimum credible deterrence and are opposed to any nuclear proliferation as well as an arms race in the region," he told a Washington forum on Monday.

Aziz, here for talks with US President George W. Bush and other senior administration officials, said Pakistan had proposed a "strategic restraint regime" to prevent an arms race and ensure that stability was maintained in the region.

He noted that arch rival India's nuclear tests in 1998 forced Pakistan "to respond in order to establish a credible nuclear deterrence."

"Failure to do so could have

created a dangerous ambiguity about our capacity and could have led to possible miscalculations," he said, stressing that Pakistan wanted to be an "anchor of peace and stability in the region."

Aziz did not speak of any new threats posed by India or other neighbours but emphasized with out elaborating that any induction of anti-ballistic missile systems would have a destabilising impact on the entire region.

The region is bristling with missiles. India, flush with success of its medium-range ballistic missile, is reportedly developing an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Pakistan has developed and tested a number of missiles while China, far ahead of others in the missile race in the region, has an arsenal of short and long-range missiles.

On Iran, Aziz said relations with the fellow Islamic nation were "guided by compulsion of geography and history."



Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse (R) receives Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim in Colombo yesterday. At least five people have been killed since Solheim arrived on the island the previous day to try and jump start the island's stalled peace process and save the ceasefire.

Lanka asks Norway to arrange early talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president yesterday asked peace broker Norway to arrange early talks with Tamil Tiger rebels and help stem the latest wave of violence that has killed at least 151 people, officials said.

President Mahinda Rajapakse held closed-door talks with Norway's top peace envoy, Erik Solheim, on salvaging the island's Oslo-backed peace process, which has remained deadlocked since April 2003, officials said.

"The president's main message was to convey to the Tigers that he is ready for early talks," an official source close to the president said. "He wants the violence to stop and talks to begin at the earliest."

The official source, who declined to be named, said Solheim would carry Rajapakse's message to the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran on

Wednesday.

Diplomatic sources close to the peace process said they were trying to arrange an initial ice-breaking meeting between the government and the Tamil Tigers by mid-February at a European venue.

A statement issued after the Rajapakse-Solheim talks gave no details, but said they had discussions "regarding the possibility of resuming negotiations with the LTTE and bringing an end to the current violence in the country."

The latest peace moves were marred by a bomb attack that killed three soldiers Monday and shootings that left two people dead in the island's restive north-eastern district of Trincomalee.

Unidentified gunmen shot dead government worker Subramaniam Sugirtharajan, 35, who also contributed to a Tamil newspaper, while another state employee was killed in Trincomalee, a military spokesman said.

Saddam trial postponed until Sunday

AFP, Baghdad

The high-profile trial of ousted Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein on charges of crimes against humanity, which was to resume yesterday after a month's delay, was again postponed until Sunday.

The court put off the hearing, which would have been the eighth since the trial began three months ago, because some witnesses were unable to attend, according to investigating judge Raed al-Juhfi.

"Due to the fact some of the complainants could not make it to attend the court, some of them are out of Iraq and some are on pilgrimage, the court decided to postpone the session until Sunday," he said, reading a court statement to reporters.

Saddam and seven co-defendants face charges including murder and torture over the massacre of more than 140 Shiites following an attempt on the life of the ousted dictator in 1982 in the village of Dujail.

India, Saudi Arabia to boost defence ties

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Terrorism, bilateral trade, energy and defence cooperation will top talks agenda of Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud in India.

The Saudi king left Beijing yesterday for a four-day official visit to India where he will hold talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today.

This is the first visit to India by a Saudi monarch in half a century and the significance attached to the event, the Indian prime minister will receive the visiting King at the airport when he arrives here from Beijing.

The Saudi monarch, who will be the chief guest at India's Republic Day parade on January 26, will also have talks with Indian President A P J Abdul Kalam, Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and the Leader of the Opposition L K

Advani.

During the Saudi King's visit, India and Saudi Arabia are expected to sign agreements on combating terrorism jointly and a convention on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of tax evasion.

The agreement on terrorism is aimed at bilateral cooperation in tackling the menace as well as crimes perpetrated by individuals, illicit narcotic trafficking and smuggling of historic artifacts.

The double taxation avoidance accord is expected to give a fillip to two-way flow of investment, technology and services. The total India-Saudi bilateral trade in 2004-5 (excluding oil import) is estimated at 2,643.37 million dollars and India is the fourth largest trading partner of Saudi Arabia.

Indian companies have set up 82 fully-owned Indian entities in Saudi Arabia and there are around 49 Indo-Saudi joint ventures in India.

INVESTIGATOR SAYS US exported torture via Europe

AFP, Strasbourg

A European investigator said yesterday there was convincing evidence that Washington sent detainees to third countries to be tortured but no "irrefutable evidence" of the existence of secret CIA prisons in Europe.

There was "a great deal of coherent, convergent evidence pointing to the existence of a system of relocation or outsourcing of torture", Dick Marty said in an interim assessment presented to the Council of Europe rights organisation.

The report, however, found no direct evidence of CIA-run facilities on European soil.

"At this stage of the investigations, there is no formal, irrefutable evidence of the existence of secret CIA detention centres in Romania, Poland or any other country," he wrote.

Factions pledge calm for Palestinian vote

AFP, Ramallah

The main armed factions pledged yesterday to ensure the second Palestinian general election passes off peacefully as security forces prepared to take up positions around polling stations.

The Palestinian Authority leadership, aware that a chaotic election will damage the case for statehood, has repeatedly appealed for all parties to respect the democratic process and the result is likely to have a profound impact on the future of the Middle East peace process.

But while foreign observers have been generally encouraged by the relative lack of violence in the lead up to Wednesday's poll, the overnight killing of a campaign staffer for the ruling Fatah faction in the West Bank city of Nablus underlined the potential for serious problems on voting day.

A spate of attacks on government buildings and the offices of the central elections commission in southern Gaza earlier this month had raised fears that the whole process could be clouded in violence.

The main armed factions including the military wing of the radical Islamist movement Hamas and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, loyal to Fatah, issued a joint state-

ment, which called for all Palestinians to take part in the vote.

"We call upon all our people, regardless of their preferences and political affiliations, to participate widely in this democratic festival," it said.

"We assert that we will not allow any element to confiscate your right to vote and elect your representatives."

Abu Adham, a leader of Al-Aqsa, said the groups would support the police effort to guard polling stations but emphasised they would not carry weapons.

The groups "will intervene if certain people violate the ban on carrying weapons," he added.

Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas has issued orders for security forces to confront anyone who tries to disrupt the vote with an "iron fist".

Former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, who oversaw last January's successful presidential election, predicted that voting would be peaceful.

"I would expect that these elections will be even better than the presidential elections," he told AFP.

"What is important is the credibility of these elections and that all parties will accept the results, whatever they are."

Montenegro train crash kills 45

AFP, Podgorica

The death toll in Montenegro from its worst rail accidents ever climbed to 45 yesterday, with nearly 200 people injured, after the train crashed into a rocky ravine in the mountainous Balkan state, officials said.

The train conductor, who was also injured, was detained for questioning by an investigating magistrate, an official source told AFP.

The train plunged down a 30-metre (100-foot) cliff near the Montenegrin capital Podgorica late on Monday afternoon in what is believed to be the worst rail crash in the former Yugoslav republic's history.

The death toll, including five children, rose overnight from 39, while the number of people on the packed passenger train who suffered injuries rose to almost 198 from 135 late on Monday night, said Podgorica hospital director Miodrag Djurovic.

"Fifty people are in a very serious state. During the night we carried out 18 difficult operations," Djurovic told journalists. The train went down a canyon

of the River Moraca, some 15km north of Podgorica, where it was travelling to from the northern town Bijelo Polje.

Witnesses said about 300 people were on the train at the time, among them many children returning from a ski trip in northern Montenegro.

3 Iraqis, 7 GIs killed in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

Seven US soldiers were killed on Monday in attacks while gunned wearing uniforms of a Shia-led security force swept into a Sunni Arab neighbourhood in central Baghdad before dawn Monday, killing three men and speeding away with more than 20 others, police and witnesses said.

On Tuesday, two German engineers working at a plant in northern Iraq were abducted Tuesday, police said.

Gunmen in two cars seized the pair, who worked at a detergent plant near an oil refinery in Beiji, about 150 miles north of Baghdad, police Capt. Laith Hamid said.

No further details were available but Hamid said police checkpoints had been set up throughout the area in an effort to find them.

Meanwhile, the US military said seven more US troops had been killed a soldier in a roadside bombing in Baghdad on Monday, two Air Force members in a blast near Taji north of the capital late Sunday, and four soldiers in a roadside bombing near the northern town of Hawijah on Friday.

There was no word on the fate of kidnapped American journalist Ji Carroll. Iraqi officials said joint US-Iraqi operations were carried out recently to free her, but they provided no details.

Also Monday, bodies of eight Sunni Arabs were found in a field north of Baghdad five days after they were seized on their way home by bus after being rejected for admission to the police academy in the capital. Twenty-three bodies of the group were found Sunday, and 35 were believed to have been on the bus. Police are often targeted by insurgents.

The pre-dawn raid in the predominantly Sunni Arab of Toubji threatens to inflame sectarian tensions as leaders of Iraq's religious and ethnic communities prepare for talks on a unity government to include Sunni Arabs, the heart of the insurgency.



Iranian policemen and rescuers work at the scene of the bomb attacks killing 8 people in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz. The area is dominated by ethnic minority Arabs, where a scheduled visit by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been cancelled at the last minute following the blasts yesterday.

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“আপনার ব্যবসা সম্পর্কে কথা বলুন”

“SME ব্যাংকিং সম্পর্কে জানুন”

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অংশগ্রহণ করুন ফ্রি ট্রেনিং-এ

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