

## Curfew and violence fail to keep Nepalese protesters down

AFP, Kathmandu

Despite the rubber bullet wounds on his face and arm from a violent protest last week, Shiva Hari returned to the streets, screaming anti-royal messages, getting tear-gassed and stoning the police.

A ban on protests and a strictly enforced curfew failed to prevent tens of thousands from coming out onto the streets on Thursday and clashing with police in at least a dozen places around Nepal's capital.

Three people were shot dead and scores injured.

Nepal has gone into a third week of crippling anti-royal protests and strikes. The number killed in the wave of nationwide protests has hit double digits.

King Gyanendra is facing a spiralling crisis in the Himalayan kingdom since he sacked the government in February 2005 and seized direct control.

The much-criticised move was needed, he said, because political parties were corrupt, had failed to hold elections and had not stemmed a decade-long Maoist insurgency that has claimed at least 12,500 lives.

The ring road encircling the capital was blocked by protesters at regular intervals Thursday. They burned tyres and put up makeshift

barricades as hundreds of police in vehicles tried to keep a lid on the massive civil unrest.

During previous curfews, diplomats, journalists, human rights groups and emergency vehicles could all obtain curfew passes, but not this time.

Many journalists who tried to go out on the streets were picked up by police officers and returned to their hotels.

Hundreds of machine-gun toting soldiers and armed riot police patrolled the deserted city centre streets.

Other journalists hid from police, walked kilometres on back roads and dodged through the lanes chased by police wielding bamboo sticks.

Hari was shot by a police shotgun with rubber-coated pellets last Tuesday, but did not think twice about coming onto the streets again.

"The king is not thinking about the people. He is dominating people with power, with tear gas and bullets," Hari said.

He lives in Gongganbu, on the northern rim of Kathmandu, but runs a shop selling shawls and scarves in Kathmandu's tourist magnet Thamel.



A Nepalese Army armoured vehicle passes by protesters staging a sit-in protest rally on the 16th day of a general strike at Kalanki in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal extended curfew and shoot-on-sight orders in the capital but pro-democracy protesters again defied security forces on the 16th day of a general strike.

## Iraqi Shias scramble for new PM nominee

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's Shia Alliance hopes to offer Kurdish and Sunni blocs a new candidate for prime minister on Friday in a renewed bid to break a deadlock over the formation of a new government before parliament meets.

The Alliance's original choice for the job, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, indicated in a televised speech on Thursday he was ready to step aside at the request of the bloc after resisting widespread calls for his resignation for months.

That raised hopes of a deal on a national unity government Washington hopes can avert a full-scale sectarian civil war and draw Arab Sunni insurgents into the political process.

The Alliance, which has the biggest bloc in parliament, had said it would hold a new vote for its nominee but shelved those plans fearing further delays and opposition again from other political alliances if they are not consulted first.

"The Alliance wants to agree on a candidate without going through another vote which could cause further delays," a senior member of the bloc told Reuters.

## India seeks German support for its nuke deal with US

REUTERS, Berlin

India hopes it can persuade Berlin to back its civil nuclear energy deal with the United States, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was quoted as saying on Thursday ahead of his visit to Germany.

"I really hope we will win Germany's support for the accord with the US on civil nuclear energy," Germany's Handelsblatt business daily quoted Singh as saying, in a preview of its Friday edition.

"Britain, France and Russia also back it," he told the paper, in a wide-ranging interview before he arrives in Germany on Sunday for a three-day visit.

New Delhi's deal with Washington in March would enable India to receive American nuclear technology and fuel even though it is not a signatory of the benchmark arms control pact, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

India and the United States want Germany's support as Berlin is a key member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) of 45 nations that possess the most advanced technology and which must approve the nuclear accord.

## Norway steps up move to save Lankan peace

### 3 cops killed in mine attacks

AFP, Colombo

Suspected Tiger rebels exploded two more mines and fought gunbattles leaving four people dead yesterday, the military said as Norway launched a fresh bid to stop the island slipping back to full-scale war.

Police said one attack, at Seerunuwara village in Trincomalee, happened as they were searching for landmines. One officer died and a second was injured, military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe said.

"They followed up the attack with small arms fire at the victims," Samarasinghe said. "Police fired back."

A police vehicle responding to the blast was then attacked with another Claymore mine that wounded four more men, a police official said, adding that two of them later succumbed to their injuries.

A civilian was also killed and at least five homes set on fire in what appeared to be inter-communal clashes sparked by the mine attacks. Security in the area has been stepped up, police said.

The latest violence comes after Norwegian peace envoy Jon

Hanssen-Bauer failed in a bid to persuade Tamil Tiger rebels to attend rescheduled talks with the Colombo government in Switzerland next week aimed at salvaging a ceasefire.

Norwegian embassy spokesman Erik Nurnberg said Hanssen-Bauer was spending Friday holding discussions with Sri Lankan officials while the head of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, Ulf Henricsson, had travelled to the rebels' political capital Kilinochchi.

Plan Implementation Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said Henricsson will stay overnight in Kilinochchi to discuss a detailed plan from Colombo to move Tiger commanders from the island's east to the north.

The Tigers had insisted that they needed to hold internal consultations before attending ceasefire talks in Switzerland and demanded transport concessions, which Colombo initially turned down.

However, Rambukwella said Colombo had now agreed to allow the Tigers to hire private helicopters and operate any number of sorties to transport their men.

"We are hoping to be able to know a definite word on the Swiss

talks after tomorrow," Rambukwella told reporters here. "We have been extremely flexible."

Tiger leaders had also demanded new conditions of security in the troubled regions before attending talks.

Tamil Tiger spokesman V. Dayanidi confirmed talks would be held with Henricsson, saying the LTTE would be represented by peace secretariat head S. Puledevan.

The Swiss talks were originally due on April 19 but were later put off for five days at the request of the Tigers.

The ceasefire has come under renewed pressure in the past two weeks due to a spate of bomb attacks.

At least 67 people were killed in the bombings alone while the Tigers said more than a dozen were killed in attacks carried out by pro-government militia.

More than 60,000 people have been killed in three decades of ethnic bloodshed between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils.

## Critics decry Bush talks with China president

AP, Washington

While they didn't announce any major agreements, President Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao both agreed that they had a productive summit meeting. US critics of China's trade policies had a different view.

"The president failed to make any significant progress in talks with his Chinese counterpart," complained Kevin Kearns, the president of the US Business and Industry Council, which represents around 1,500 small and medium-sized manufacturing companies.

Officials at the National Association of Manufacturers were only slightly less gloomy.

"This really sounds like a missed opportunity," said Frank Vargo, international vice president for the manufacturers' group. "We were really hoping that significant progress would be made so that both governments would begin to work

together to address this very large trade imbalance."

And on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers are pushing a variety of measures that would punish China for its current practices, lawmakers expressed disappointment in the outcome of Thursday's half-day summit at the White House.

"I am extremely disappointed that President Hu did not commit to take concrete steps to allow China's currency to reflect market forces," said Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., who is sponsoring legislation that would withhold certain economic benefits from China if it does not move faster on currency reform.

Hu was wrapping up his four-day visit to America with a speech Friday at Yale University.

Protesters, including human rights activists and members of Falun Gong, a banned religious movement in China, planned protests a block or two away from where Hu was to speak. Security plans had

called for protesters to gather on the city green, further away from the speech and off Yale grounds, but university officials made a rare exception and allowed protests on the historic Old Campus.

Hu spent Tuesday and Wednesday making stops in Washington state, including visits with officials of Microsoft Corp. and Boeing Co., in an effort to emphasize support for expanded US exports to China.

Many American manufacturers contend that the Chinese yuan is undervalued by as much as 40 percent, making Chinese products cheaper for American consumers and American goods more expensive in China.

At the White House, Hu made it clear that he had not come to offer any new commitments. "We have taken measures and we will continue to take steps to properly resolve the issue," Hu said.

## Iran still years away from having nukes

AFP, Washington

US intelligence chief John Negroponte said Thursday Iran's resumption of uranium enrichment is "troublesome" but the country is still years away from having enough fissile material to make a nuclear weapon.

Negroponte expressed concern both about Iran's claim to have resumed uranium enrichment with a cascade of 164 centrifuges in Natanz and extreme statements made by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"The developments in Iran — clearly they're troublesome," he said in response to questions after a speech to the National Press Club.

"By the same token, our assessment at the moment is that even though we believe that Iran is determined to acquire or obtain a nuclear weapon, that we believe that it is still a

number of years off before they are likely to have enough fissile material to assemble into, or to put into a nuclear weapon; perhaps into the next decade," he said.

"So I think it's important that this issue be kept in perspective," he said.

Negroponte is marking his first year in office as the director of national intelligence, a post created in the wake of the intelligence fiasco over Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Critics have complained that the new intelligence directorate, which is supposed to coordinate the work of some 15 US intelligence agencies, is developing into another bloated bureaucracy with nearly 1,000 people reportedly working for it.

Negroponte denied that the reforms he is pursuing have been "a theory-based experiment or an exercise in bureaucratic bloat."

## 6 Afghan cops, US soldier killed in Taliban attack

AFP, Kabul

Fundamentalist Taliban militants killed six Afghan police and burned four of their bodies, while a US soldier was shot dead in a separate attack, officials said yesterday.

The violence was the latest in war-torn Afghanistan's troubled southern regions, where militants from the ousted Taliban regime have stepped up a four-year insurgency.

Highway police commander Raz Mohammad said armed insurgents stormed a checkpoint in Maywand district of southern Kandahar province on Thursday night, killing six of his men.

"Taliban attacked a highway police post overnight and killed six police", he said.

"They set ablaze the post with four police bodies inside."

Kandahar was the birthplace of the ultra-Islamic Taliban movement which, backed by Pakistan, took

over most of the country during its 1996-2001 reign.

Meanwhile the US soldier was killed and an Afghan National Army soldier was wounded in Deh Rawood district of neighbouring Uruzgan province on Friday, a US military statement said.

It said the US trooper, whose name was being withheld pending notification of next of kin, came under attack by small arms fire while his patrol investigated a weapons cache.

"We deeply mourn the loss of one of our soldiers," Colonel Thomas Collins, a spokesman for the US-led coalition in Afghanistan, said in the statement.

The wounded Afghan soldier was evacuated to the southern city of Kandahar for treatment.

Fourteen US troops have now died in hostile action in Afghanistan this year.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II sits in the Regency Room at Buckingham Palace in London as she looks at some of the cards which have been sent to her for her 80th birthday.

## UK celebrates Queen's 80th birthday

AFP, London

A beaming Queen Elizabeth II greeted flag-waving fans on her 80th birthday yesterday outside Windsor Castle, basking in a popularity that has staved off calls to scrap the monarchy.

The sprightly queen, who still travels throughout Britain and the rest of the world, accepted flowers and birthday gifts as she emerged from Windsor Castle, the ancient royal retreat west of London.

With her husband Prince Philip in tow, the queen, dressed in a fuchsia pink overcoat and matching hat, chatted with excited well-wishers of all ages who were standing behind metal barricades.

The celebrations highlight how her popularity has endured despite the family divorces and scandals that shook the House of Windsor in the 1990s and raised doubts about how long the monarchy would last.

The queen has received tens of thousands of birthday cards and e-mail messages from across Britain as well as from Canada, Australia and other former colonies in the 53-nation Commonwealth.

Tributes have also poured in from Britain's politicians who have called her a pillar of strength as Britain's head of state and the head of the Commonwealth.



A Sri Lankan policeman checks the bicycle of a local man at a check-point in the north-eastern Sri Lankan port city of Trincomalee yesterday. Four people, including three policemen, were killed in separate mine blasts blamed on Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday as Norway launched a fresh bid to save the island's tottering peace process.