

Nepal must halt shoot-on-sight policy: UN expert

AFP, Geneva

A United Nations human rights expert yesterday urged Nepal's government to halt a "shoot-on-sight" policy against anti-king protesters, saying it could constitute a crime against humanity.

"The Nepalese government must immediately repeal its 'shoot-on-sight' policy for dealing with demonstrators," said Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

"The government is, in effect, instructing its forces to shoot innocent people, in complete disregard for the right to life," Alston said in a statement.

"In particular, such an approach reflects no attempt to balance the rights to political participation and to freedom of expression and association with any legitimate notion of the need to maintain public order."

Nepal has been rocked by almost

three weeks of strikes and violent protests which mark an attempt to end nearly 15 months of absolute rule by the Himalayan country's monarch, King Gyanendra.

At least 14 people have been killed in clashes across the country between demonstrators and the security forces, with hundreds injured and many more arrested.

Authorities have imposed the shoot-on-sight rule in an effort to enforce a curfew.

Alston said that "a full, independent investigation (of the deaths) must be undertaken as soon as possible."

"Under international law, widespread or systematic attacks against the civilian population are crimes against humanity," Alston added.

"Members of the police and military who comply with orders to gun down demonstrators will eventually be held to account."

Six killed as Nepali Maoists raid town

Curfew in capital to thwart anti-king protests

REUTERS, Kathmandu

At least five Maoist rebels and a Nepali soldier were killed when hundreds of rebels stormed an eastern town overnight, the army said yesterday, as a fresh curfew was clamped on the capital to thwart anti-king protests.

Sunday night's attack by the insurgents - fighting to overthrow the monarchy since 1996 -- was among the biggest in nearly three weeks since a mass pro-democracy campaign erupted across the impoverished Himalayan kingdom.

The attack may have been designed to increase pressure on the king and engage security forces already struggling to quell protests around the country, analysts said.

It took place in Chautara, about 100km east of Kathmandu, when the rebels attacked a police station, district administration office, a

telecommunications tower and a jail in the town, authorities said.

"We have found bodies of five Maoists in combat dress. One soldier also died," an army officer told Reuters, adding that four civilians were wounded in the crossfire.

"We have foiled their attempt to overrun the town," he said. Chautara lies in the hills of Sindhupalchowk district, a stronghold of the rebels.

A Reuters reporter on his way to the area said that the rebels had blocked the road about 30km short of Chautara town with fallen trees and boulders, apparently to prevent troops from rushing in reinforcements.

District authorities had requested helicopter support and reinforcements, one government official said, while some locals near the area said the fighting could still be going on.

News of the attack came as an alliance of seven political parties vowed to hold more anti-king protests on Monday for the 19th consecutive day, and bring hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets of Kathmandu for a major rally on Tuesday.

"We are preparing for a massive rally, to fill the entire ring road with people," Kashinath Adhikary, an official from the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the country's second biggest political party, told Reuters.

He said top leaders would lead the demonstrations on Tuesday for the first time since this round of protests began on April 6.

Although the 27 km ring road lies within the curfew zone, large stretches are in the hands of the protesters, with burning logs and tires blocking access to security forces.



Nepalese residents walk past a fire set by the pro-democracy protesters in streets in the streets of Kathmandu yesterday. Maoist rebels have called a ceasefire in and around Kathmandu where thousands of Nepalis have taken to the streets over the last 18 days and gone on strike in a protest against the absolute rule of King Gyanendra.

6 Philippine MPs, ex-senator, military trio face coup charges

AFP, Manila

Six Philippine legislators and a former senator were indicted Monday on charges of allegedly conspiring with communist rebels and rightwing soldiers to topple President Gloria Arroyo, the justice department said yesterday.

Senior state prosecutor Emmanuel Velasco accused House of Representatives members Crispin Beltran, Teodoro Casino, Rafael Mariano, Liza Maza, Satur Ocampo, and Joel Virador of being communist guerrillas who had used their elective posts to destabilise the government.

He said the six plotted with ex-army colonel Gregorio Honasan, who served two terms in the senate after winning a presidential pardon for leading a series of failed coup attempts in the 1980s and two fugitive right-wing military rebels, as well as 40 unidentified leftists.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) looks on as German Chancellor Angela Merkel shakes hands with a robot during a tour of the Hanover Technology Fair in Hanover yesterday. India is the fair's partner country this year which features over 340 exhibitors.

Germany sidesteps Indo-US nuke pact

AFP, Berlin

India and Germany agreed Sunday to deepen their cooperation on energy policy but sidestepped a dispute over a nuclear deal between New Delhi and Washington that Berlin has criticized.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met with Chancellor Angela Merkel in this northern city ahead of the opening of the Hanover Technology Fair, where guest country India and Germany, the world's number three economy, hope to boost their rapidly growing trade ties.

Singh noted at a joint news conference that the booming Indian economy was driving an enormous appetite for energy -- a key issue behind the controversial India-US civilian nuclear deal.

The pact, concluded during US President George W. Bush's visit to New Delhi in March, will give India access to previously forbidden

technology for the development of power stations.

India has promised in return to separate its military and civilian facilities and open most of the latter to international inspections.

The deal must be ratified by the US Congress and the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group -- of which Germany is a key member.

Merkel told reporters at the news conference with Singh that Germany would wait for the decision of the US Congress, where doubts have also been raised, before taking a definitive stand.

But she said she was encouraged by Singh's assurance that India agreed with the principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, although it has refused to sign it.

Abuse of prisoners in Iraqi jails continues

REUTERS, Washington

US and Iraqi inspectors have discovered abuse of prisoners in detention centres run by Iraq's Interior Ministry that were visited as recently as February, the Washington Post reported yesterday.

Citing US and Iraqi sources involved with the inspections, the Post said US troops did not respond by transferring all of the detainees to safety, as they did after finding 173 prisoners, some of whom showed signs of torture, in a secret Baghdad bunker in November.

Only a small number of the most severely abused detainees at one of six detention centres inspected since November were moved for medical treatment, while prisoners at two others were transferred to ease overcrowding, the Post said.

4 more killed in Lanka violence

Fears of ethnic riots mount

REUTERS, Colombo

Four people were shot dead in fresh Sri Lankan violence yesterday, while the killing of six Sinhalese farmers by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels the previous day raised fears of more ethnic riots.

Some 100 people have died in just over two weeks after a series of suspected Tamil Tiger ambushes on the military were followed by attacks on Tamil civilians.

Both sides say they are still working towards talks that were scheduled for last week in Switzerland, but are now indefinitely postponed. But diplomats say the peace process seems deadlocked and some fear a return to the island's two-decade civil war.

In eastern Sri Lanka, troops shot dead two suspected rebels setting

up a fragmentation mine ambush, the army said. One soldier was wounded.

An explosion in the northern town of Jaffna hurt no one, but two Home Guard troopers were later shot dead in Vavuniya, another town in Sri Lanka's north.

An army spokesman said troops had increased their presence around the village where six farmers were shot dead late on Sunday, in the northeastern district of Trincomalee.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), whose campaign for a Tamil homeland has killed more than 64,000 people on both sides, accuse the almost exclusively Sinhalese army of "ethnic cleansing" in the island's northeast, as well as increasingly frequent murders of Tamil civilians.

Seven car bombs rock Baghdad

19 killed, bodies of 15 others found

AFP, Baghdad

Car bombings and shootings killed 19 people and wounded more than 100 in Baghdad yesterday as Washington stepped up pressure for Shia premier designate Jawad al-Maliki to form a government and halt Iraq's slide into civil war.

Insurgents set off seven car bombs, two of them at a Baghdad university, security officials said. Five people died in the coordinated attack on the Mustansiriya University that also wounded 25.

A car bomb in the north Baghdad neighbourhood of Bab al-Muhaddam killed three people and wounded 25, while another in Tahrir Square in the city centre wounded 15.

Two car bombs also went off within minutes of each other in east Baghdad, wounding nine. A seventh bomb exploded in the upscale Mansur neighborhood, wounding seven.

Six people died in a series of shootings in south Baghdad's restive Al-Dura district, while one civilian was killed near the restive city of Baquba, north of the capital.

Late Sunday, police found the bodies of 15 young men near Abu Ghraib on Baghdad's western outskirts.

"All the men had bullets in their heads," an interior ministry official said.

Further north, four police and two insurgents were killed in clashes near ousted president Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, police said.

Clashes broke out when the rebels, driving in a Toyota pick-up truck and wearing explosive belts, fired on the policemen at a checkpoint on the road between Tikrit and Tuz, an officer said.

"The bodies of the two terrorists are still lying at the site," the officer said, adding: "Nobody wants to touch them as the explosives belts are still on them."

The latest wave of violence came as US President George W. Bush stepped up pressure on Maliki to quickly form a national unity government, with the US military facing one of its bloodiest periods in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.

Efforts to counter human trafficking are deficient: UN

AFP, Vienna

The United Nations on Monday condemned as uncoordinated and inefficient global efforts to counter human trafficking, saying the crime implicated nearly every country in the world.

"Virtually no country in the world is unaffected by the crime of human trafficking for sexual exploitation or forced labour," the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in its first study on the scale of the phenomenon.

"Efforts to counter trafficking have so far been uncoordinated and inefficient. The lack of systematic reporting by authorities is a real problem. Governments need to try harder," said UNODC director Antonio Maria Costa.

He said it was "extremely difficult" to establish how many victims there were worldwide but added that "the fact that this form of slavery still exists in the 21st century shames us all".

The UNODC has identified 127 nations, mainly in Asia and Eastern

Europe, as sources of trafficking victims, and 137 as destinations. The latter include the European Union, North America, the Gulf states, Israel, Turkey, China and Japan.

A massive 77 percent of trafficking cases involve women. A substantial 33 percent involve children and just nine percent involve men, according to the UNODC. Sexual exploitation is a factor in 87 percent of cases and other forms of forced labour in 28 percent.

The UNODC, which relied solely on public sources of information, stressed the incomplete nature of the data, saying this was mainly due to a lack of cooperation from some governments.

"Efforts to combat trafficking are being hampered by a lack of accurate data, reflecting the unwillingness of some countries to acknowledge that the problem affects them," it said.

The UNODC is calling for improved international cooperation to combat human trafficking and protect its victims.



Kashmiri Muslim women queue at a polling station to cast their vote as an Indian paramilitary troops stands guard at Pattan, about 30km north of Srinagar yesterday. Hundreds of Kashmiris queued in front of polling booths to cast their votes for four state assembly seats despite a polls boycott by the separatist parties.

Tape a vexing reminder of US failure to find Laden

AFP, Washington

The White House said Sunday that al-Qaeda leaders were "on the run" as the emergence of a new tape from Osama bin Laden served as a vexing reminder of the US failure to track down the terror mastermind.

"The al-Qaeda leadership is on the run and under a lot of pressure. We are continuing to take the fight to the enemy abroad, and making it difficult for them to plan and plot against America," White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters, adding that the US intelligence community believes the tape is authentic.

Another top US official cautioned that the audiotape warning by Osama bin Laden aired by Al-Jazeera on Sunday should not be taken lightly.

"I believe we need to take him seriously," US ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad said in an interview with CNN, adding that bin Laden was vying to demonstrate with the tape that "he's still a player".