

Nepal peace deal ignites fresh debate over king's role

REUTERS, ramuapuri

In the heat of Nepal's pro-democracy protests, in a swirl of smoke from burning tyres, demonstrators hung a rat from electricity wires and dangled a banner from its body declaring that King Gyanendra was dead.

Two months later, tempers have calmed. Gyanendra surrendered power at the end of April and has kept a low profile ever since.

He has few friends among Nepal's young urban middle class, but in the countryside it is clear that the royal family retains a degree of respect.

Just as a family cannot run without the head of the household, this family, this country cannot run without the king," said 55-year-old Ramrup Karki, a farmer with an impressive handlebar moustache from the village of Ramuapuri, 500 km southwest of Kathmandu.

Nepal's Maoist rebels have been fighting for 10 years for the abolition of monarchy. The conflict has claimed 13,000 lives, but peace is drawing close, the rebels have been invited to join an interim government, and debate is raging about their agenda.

As part of a deal with political parties agreed last Friday, elections will be held next year for a special assembly to draw up a new constitution and review the monarchy's future.

Rebel chief Prachanda told Reuters last week his forces would respect "the verdict of the masses". But he added: "It is our faith that the verdict will come in favour of a democratic republic".

Five dead in Pak tribal clash over water issue

AFP, peshawar

Five people died in a gunbattle between rival tribes over access to water in a remote northwestern Pakistani town near the Afghan border, officials said Tuesday.

The shootout erupted on Monday when members of one clan diverted water from a canal near Parachinar town in the tribal Kurram region and attacked farmers from a rival tribe when they demanded a share.

"Five people are confirmed dead," local administration chief Mohammad Saleem Khan told AFP. Residents however put the toll at 12 dead and 31 wounded.

"Rival tribes are perched on the hillsides and heavy firing is still going on," a resident said on condition of anonymity.

Khan said authorities had arranged a council of tribal elders to resolve the situation.

"The jirga (council) has gone to the site of the clash to convince the armed men to come down from the hills," he said.

"We hope a ceasefire will be arranged later in the day."

Reuters adds: Pakistani authorities sent troops to a remote region on the Afghan border on Tuesday to end clashes over scarce water after five people were killed.

Pakistan faces a serious water shortage this year after light rain and snow over the winter. Water rights are a divisive issue in many parts of the country, but the clashes in the Kurram region are the most serious this year over the resource.

Violence erupted on Monday when people of one clan tried to divert water from an irrigation canal to their fields and men from another clan resisted.

The rivals battled with rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades and five people were killed and 27 wounded, said the region's administrator, Mohammad Salim Khan.

EC decision on voter listing

FROM PAGE 1

upazila headquarters. It also decided to publish a supplementary voter list, rather than a draft, containing the names of the new voters.

Sticking to the EC position, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz claimed on Monday again that the EC is acting "in accordance with" the court's order.

"We will act in accordance with the court's verdict and directives...but it is not possible to visit door-to-door following the court's directives," Aziz told journalists.

Legal experts and former election commissioners have alleged that the CEC is misinterpreting the court's verdict and the electoral ordinance and rules.

"[The CEC] is giving wrong interpretation of the court's

verdict to justify his earlier unconstitutional activities as he has wasted the fund in connection with preparation of the voter list and there is no fund for the task now," Justice Ghulam Rabbani, former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Under this circumstances created by his own foolishness, he is trying to give his own interpretation of the court's verdict," he said.

Echoing the view, former election commissioner Justice Naimuddin Ahmed said, "The subtle spirit of the judgment is to revise the existing voter list following the appropriate procedure prescribed in the laws. But the Election Commission is not doing it."

He said, "[The SC] observation is the guidelines for the Election Commission. It must follow the observation...to revise the existing electoral rolls in accordance with the procedure that makes door-to-door visit mandatory."

Former election commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told The Daily Star yesterday, "There is no ambiguity in the court's verdict that clearly referred to the related laws for revising the existing voter list by visiting door-to-door. There will be no controversy if the Election Commission follows the court's verdict in preparing the voter list."

Justice Rabbani said there is even no necessity to wait for the court's directives for preparing the voter list. "It is the constitutional duty of the Election Commission to do the job. It is an

audacious attitude to wait for any court's directives for preparing the electoral rolls," he said.

On June 12, the EC decided to follow one of the High Court's January 4 directives, modified by the SC, regarding deletion of the names from the existing voter list. The SC in its modification referred to the legal procedure for deleting the names in accordance with the Electoral Rolls Rules, 1982.

The EC also adopted another sub-rule of the Electoral Rolls Rules, 1982 for inclusion of names in the voter list. The sub-rule, however, was not referred to in the SC modification.

Justice Naimuddin said the procedure the EC has initiated is applicable only after completing the revision of the voter list.

Mohammad Ali also echoed him. "The Election Commission is wasting time by taking up the wrong procedure, which is applicable after making revision of the voter list," he said.

Teachers strike

FROM PAGE 1

banner Bangladesh Community Primary Teachers Association, are continuing their hunger strike until death in the capital from the same day. They have kept their educational institutions closed.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, also in charge of the primary and mass education ministry, urged the teachers to return to their schools and give lessons, assuring them of fulfilling their rightful demands in phases. She was addressing the prize distribution and closing ceremony of National Primary Week 2006 at the city's Osmani Memorial Auditorium yesterday.

Teachers of both government and community primary schools have vowed to continue their strike saying that the prime minister did not mention the exact date of meeting their demands.

"We heard the prime minister on television but we did not get any assurance letters from the ministry," Kazi AK Fazul Haq, general secretary of Bangladesh Primary Teachers Association, told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

He said they held a meeting at

Mirpur in the capital with the representatives of schools to scrutinise their future agitation programmes.

The government primary school teachers decided they would continue their strike and go on a hunger strike until death from June 24 to force the government to meet their demands.

Two factions of Bangladesh Community Primary Teachers Association wearing shrouds continued their hunger strike until death in separate places demanding their five-point demand which includes nationalisation of their jobs.

The pro-BNP teachers' association continued to observe their hunger strike at Muktagong while the pro-Awami League teachers' association started their strike at the Central Shaheed Minar on Sunday.

Around 65 teachers, 50 pro-Awami League and 15 pro-BNP, had decided to take their lives in protest yesterday but their programme was postponed.

"We postponed our suicide programme because around 30 teachers became sick," said Mahabubul Alam, secretary general of the BNP-backed association.

BB starts probing loans

FROM PAGE 1

BB Governor Salehuddin Ahmed yesterday expected that Oriental will soon come out of its existing problem as the performance of the bank recorded yesterday was healthier.

He made the comment while he was answering to questions from journalists at a programme of Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited at Hotel Purbani International in the capital.

The central bank has no plan to takeover full control of any other bank right now, the governor said adding that although it is monitoring financial situations of a few other banks as well.

Banks that still have poor records can come out of the situation through their own initiatives, as some other banks did so in the past without any external interference, the governor said citing the example of City Bank.

Murshid Kuli Khan, the BB appointed new administrator of Oriental Bank, had a busy first day at the bank's head office at Karwanbazar. Throughout the day he talked to managers of branches outside Dhaka over the telephone while in the afternoon he took time to have a meeting with managers of different branches in Dhaka.

The managers informed the administrator that the depositors' faith on the bank returned again. They also informed him that there had been no abnormal withdrawal by the clients in

their branches. One of the clients having a fixed deposit in the bank in fact showed interest yesterday to deposit more money although the bank is going through a transition period.

Earlier on Monday, the BB served show cause notices to the chairman and other members of the now defunct board of directors of Oriental Bank and to its freshly withdrawn managing director asking them to reply within seven days, and simultaneously made their removal effective on the same day.

Inspection teams from BB's head office were sent to different branches of Oriental in Dhaka yesterday while teams from BB's regional offices were asked to inspect the bank's branches outside Dhaka.

The investigation teams will probe into the loan sanction process, especially regarding who were provided with loans, whether those were sanctioned against real or fictitious names as well as what types of other irregularities were committed.

BB officials said their main job will be to identify the 'breach'. He also said those found guilty will have to face criminal charges.

The investigating team will review what measures were taken against the top twenty loan defaulters in each of Oriental's branches and if the actions taken against the defaulters are found to be inadequate, the central bank will ask the Oriental's administration to take additional measures against the defaulters.

Oriental happens to be the first commercial bank which is in such a dire situation. A BB official said they took the issue very seriously as the interest of the banking industry is associated with it. He also said the government signalled the BB to do everything it deems fit as the government had realised that troubles in the banking sector may have a serious effect on the economy and it does not want to put the sector into difficulties for the sake of a few individuals.

The Bank Company Act allows the BB to keep Oriental under its command for two years after the legal procedure concerning the show cause notices comes to an end. BB officials hoped that they will be able to restructure the bank within the stipulated time and turn it into a sound financial organisation.

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