

New Nepal govt presents policies in parliament

King sidelined, PM skips policy address

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's new government presented its annual policies in parliament yesterday at a ceremony, which for first time did not include the king, and the prime minister was absent to poor health.

The parliament, reinstated by King Gyanendra in April after pro-democracy protests in which at least 18 people died, recently stripped the king of his legislative roles and took over his control of the army.

In previous years, King Gyanendra, who turned 60 on Friday, delivered the annual address outlining government policy and programmes.

But on Sunday, the ornate throne from where the king used to sit had been removed and a big national flag stood in its place.

Deputy Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli, addressed the legislature on behalf of 84-year-old Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who has been in hospital since last week with pneumonia.

"The government is committed to establishing sustainable peace in the country by ending the decade-long violent conflict," Oli said, referring to the Maoist insurgency in which more than 13,000 people have died.

The new multi-party government

and the Maoists have been observing a ceasefire since the king ended his absolute rule.

Koirala, in a landmark meeting with rebel chief Prachanda, agreed in June to set up an interim cabinet including the guerrillas to oversee elections for an assembly to prepare a new constitution and decide the future of monarchy.

The Maoists say the king must abdicate or face execution. But some, including the ailing Koirala, see a ceremonial role for the monarchy in deeply traditional Nepal.

"Given the present situation that the Communist Party of Nepal

(Maoist) is engaged with the government of Nepal in a peace process to come to the path of peaceful multi-party competition by giving up arms, it becomes a pious duty of all of us to take a step at a quicker pace in the direction toward establishing peace," Oli told the chamber.

Last week, the government invited the United Nations to monitor weapons held by rebels and government troops ahead of assembly elections expected in 2007.

Nepal's main political parties and the Maoists struck a deal in November under which the guerrillas committed themselves to rejoin the political mainstream.



PHOTO: AFP
Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli presents the policies and programmes of the government before Parliament in Kathmandu yesterday. The ailing Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala missed the first policy announcement by the recently reinstated parliament because of ill health.

India tests N-capable ballistic missile

REUTERS, Bhubaneswar

India yesterday test-fired its longest-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile, the Agni III, which can hit targets deep within China, a senior defence ministry official said.

The missile, whose name means fire, has a range of more than 3,000 km, and was launched from Wheeler island off the coast of the eastern state of Orissa, a senior defence ministry official said.

The test was successful, he added.

Analysts say the successful test pushed India into a new phase in its long-term nuclear defence strategy.

"This means that India has entered an altogether different league of nations, a new club," Rahul Bedi, India correspondent of Jane's Defence Weekly, told Reuters.

"We can now reach large parts of northern China making our deterrence capacity stronger. Also, when a country is able to develop a missile, which can travel 3,500 km, it is not difficult to make something that can go 5,000 km.

"Very few nations have that capacity."

Relations between India and China have taken off in recent years, powered largely by their booming economies.

But the two countries, who went to war in 1962, still have border disputes and analysts say India's long-term defence strategies focus on its nuclear-armed neighbours, Pakistan and China.

"I think India's missile development and relations with China have been deliberately de-linked. Building muscles during peace time is a healthy exercise," Bedi said.

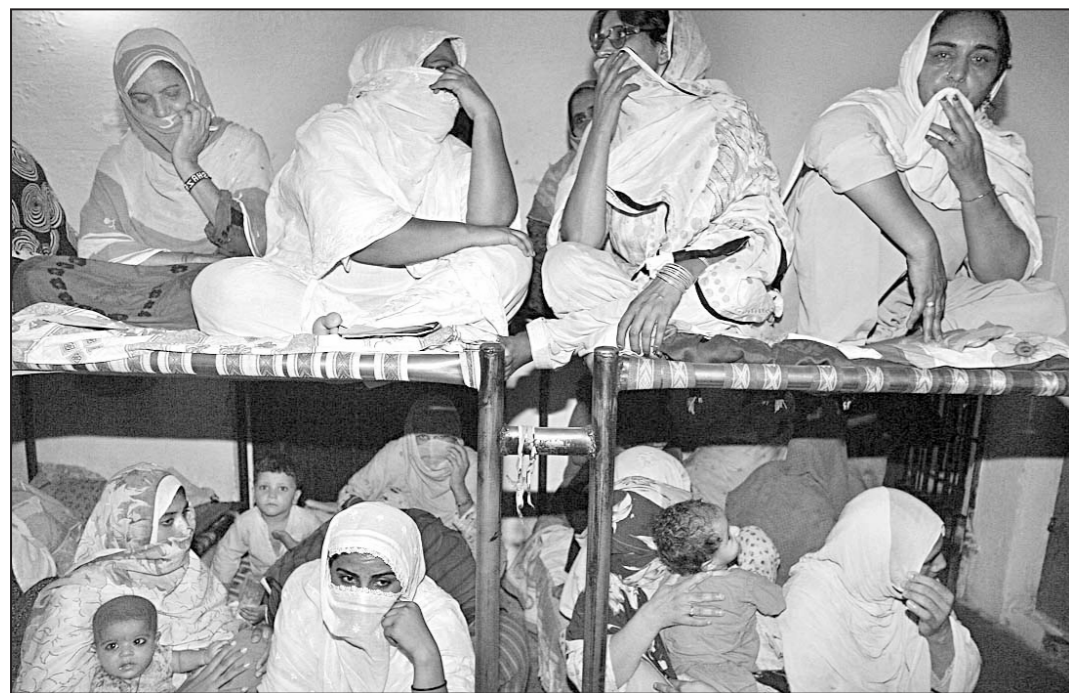


PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani women prisoners sit in a cell with their children at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Saturday. Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf amended July 7 a controversial law to allow women detained on charges of adultery and other minor crimes to be released on bail.

DR Congo militia frees Nepalese peacekeepers

AFP, Kinshasa

Militiamen in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Saturday released five Nepalese United Nations peacekeepers taken hostage last month, the UN mission in the country said.

"The five Nepalese UN soldiers were released on Saturday around 5:00 pm local time (1500 GMT). They are safe and well," Kemal Saiki, spokesman for the UN mission in DRC, told AFP.

The five rejoined their comrades at their base in Kwandroma, 80 kilometres (50 miles) northeast of Bunia near the Ugandan border, the UN mission in the country (MONUC) said.

The five men were among a group of seven peacekeepers kidnapped on May 28 during a joint military operation with the DRC army. The other two were released unharmed on June 27.

Pakistani forces kills 20 rebel tribesmen

AFP, Quetta

Pakistani troops backed by helicopter gunships have killed more than 20 rebel tribesmen and destroyed their hideouts in the troubled southwestern province of Baluchistan, officials said yesterday.

"Security forces destroyed seven fugitives' camps and killed up to 23 miscreants in a search operation launched since Saturday in Bhambore, Sangseela, Ghorai and Surang areas," a security official told AFP.

Fifteen rebels were injured while 40 surrendered, the official added on condition of anonymity. There were no casualties among security forces, he added.

Some 25 rebels were killed on Wednesday by security forces in a similar operation in the Sangseela mountains of troubled Dera Bugti district.

Mineral-rich but sparsely populated Baluchistan has witnessed near-daily attacks on security forces

and government installations since an insurgency erupted in early 2005 that has since claimed hundreds of lives.

The attacks have been blamed on tribal rebels who are demanding more political rights and a greater share of profits from the region's natural resources.

Meanwhile, suspected tribal rebels attacked a paramilitary checkpoint in Pakistan's restive southwestern Baluchistan province, killing a soldier and wounding two others, officials said.

The assailants attacked the post with rockets and assault rifles in Sui town, some 420 kilometres (262 miles) south of the provincial capital Quetta, a security official said.

In another incident in the area, rebels blew up three power pylons, suspending electricity supply to the towns of Dera Bugti and Sui, where Pakistan has its main gas installations, government official Ghibrial Khan said.

Canadian soldier among 23 killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A Canadian soldier was killed during an assault on a Taliban stronghold in southern Afghanistan yesterday as a Peruvian soldier and 21 rebels died in other weekend violence, officials said.

Most of the rebels were killed in an attack by foreign and Afghan troops on an insurgent stronghold around the Panjwayi area of Kandahar province that began early Saturday and continued into Sunday, a coalition spokeswoman said.

The bodies of 10 were discovered on Sunday while five were killed on Saturday, Captain Julie Roberge said.

The Canadian corporal, a reservist, was killed near Panjwayi while "engaging enemy elements," Lieutenant Commander Mark MacIntyre said.

Three other coalition soldiers, two of them Canadians, were wounded in Panjwayi on Saturday. One was evacuated to a military hospital in Germany with serious injuries, military officials said.

The Canadian was the 17th soldier from his country to be killed in Afghanistan since 2001, when US-led forces toppled the hardline Taliban regime.

An upsurge of Taliban-linked violence has killed more than 50 foreign soldiers in the country this year, most of them Americans.

Afghan, British, Canadian and US soldiers are involved in a major anti-Taliban operation, Mountain Thrust, that has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of militants since it was launched mid-May.

In other violence over the weekend a Peruvian soldier serving with a Spanish contingent with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was killed in a blast in the west of the country on Saturday.

The blast was probably caused by an anti-tank mine set off by remote control, Spanish Defence Minister Jose Antonio Alonso said Sunday.

Four other soldiers were wounded in the explosion about 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the city of Farah.

Lanka appoints temporary army chief as Fonseka recuperates

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has appointed a temporary army chief to fill in for Sarath Fonseka who is in Singapore for medical treatment after surviving a suicide bomb attack in April, the army said yesterday.

Fonseka's deputy, Major General Nanda Mallawarachchi, was named the acting army head on Friday, an army spokesman said.

"This is a temporary arrangement until the return of General Fonseka," the spokesman said.

Fonseka was wounded in an April 25 suicide bomb attack inside the tightly-guarded army headquarters in the capital. The attack, which killed 11 people, was carried out by a woman pretending to be pregnant.

Official sources said the acting appointment indicated a longer than expected recuperation for Fonseka who became army chief in December.

The army's number three officer was killed in a suicide bomb attack in June.

The government has blamed the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who have waged a separatist insurgency since 1972, for both attacks.

N Korea braces for 'all-out war': Kim

Tensions mount ahead of UN sanction vote

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il vowed no compromise and said he was braced for "all-out war" as tension mounted yesterday ahead of a UN vote on whether to impose sanctions on Pyongyang for its missile tests.

Japan, which with the United States has led the push to punish the communist state, said it would not rule out a preemptive strike on North Korea in case of a direct nuclear threat, leading Seoul to accuse Tokyo of aggravating the situation.

As China and Russia held firm against the UN draft resolution to put further sanctions on the impoverished North, a US envoy stressed a diplomatic solution on disarmament and urged Pyongyang to return to stalled talks on disarmament.

But Kim, in his first reported remarks since his regime test fired seven missiles into the sea Wednesday, pledged not to give up his weapons programmes.

"The General has declared that not even a tiny concession will be made to the imperialist US invaders, our arch enemy," said a broadcast on North Korean state television, as

monitored by South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

Kim, who never speaks himself in public, said that if the United States took "revenge," it would mean "all-out war."

"It is out of the General's conviction, desire and courage that we should respond to the enemy's knife with a sword and to the enemy's gun with a cannon," the television said.

North Korea, which declared last year it had nuclear weapons, in November walked out of six-way talks on ending its nuclear program, protesting a set of US financial sanctions.

Last week's missile launch included the new Taepodong-2, which was believed to be capable of reaching Alaska or Hawaii but quickly crashed into the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso said Tokyo had the right to carry out a preemptive attack in the face of a serious threat despite its pacifist post-World War II constitution.

"It is impossible for us to do nothing until we are attacked by a country which says it has nuclear weapons and could fire missiles against Japan," Aso, an outspoken hawk, told NHK public television.

Aso stood firm on the UN resolu-

tion. The Security Council, where Japan has tried in vain to win the same veto power as sanctions opponents China and Russia, will decide Monday when to vote on the draft.

"If we give in to just one veto power, then we will end up sending a wrong message to the international community," Aso said.

South Korea, which has sour ties with Japan tied to its brutal 1910-1945 occupation of the Korean peninsula, criticized Tokyo for its "shrill voice."

"There is nothing good in heightening tensions on the Korean peninsula and worsening inter-Korean relations. This will not help at all to settle the nuclear issue or the missile issue," said a statement from the office of President Roh Moo-Hyun's spokesman.

Roh also rebuffed his conservative domestic critics who have accused him of jeopardising security through his policy of seeking reconciliation with Pyongyang.

Both South Korea and China, the North's main ally and host of the six-party talks, were left red-faced by the missile tests, which Pyongyang carried out despite weeks of appeals.



PHOTO: AFP
An Indian family walks in the first monsoon downpour at Rajpath in New Delhi yesterday. The Indian capital received its first monsoon showers, bringing relief to residents who have been reeling under hot and humid conditions for the past few days.