



The body of late King Birendra (Top) and Queen Aishwarya are being carried during a funeral procession for cremation in Kathmandu on Saturday. King Birendra, Queen Aishwarya along with several members of the royal family who apparently gunned down by their son, Crown Prince Dipendra late Friday during a family dinner at the royal palace in Kathmandu, were cremated on Saturday.

## Monarchy faces fresh challenge in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

The slaying of Nepal's royal family poses fresh challenges to a country already facing daunting social, economic and political problems and raises questions about the very future of the monarchy.

The short-term scenario for the impoverished and politically unstable Himalayan kingdom is extremely messy.

Crown Prince Dipendra, who is widely believed to be responsible for gunning down his father, King Birendra, the queen, his brother and sister and four other royals on Friday night, was declared the new king on Saturday.

But having reportedly turned his gun on himself, he is currently on life support in hospital and state radio reported Sunday that his condition was "extremely serious".

Should he die, the crown will pass to his uncle, Prince Gyanendra, who has already been appointed regent.

The regent is not a particularly popular figure, and there are concerns that he is less than committed to the continuation of parliamentary democracy, privately favouring a return to the pre-1990 system of absolute monarchy.

"If he sees the chance, I don't think he would hesitate to throw out the constitution and go back to the old way," said one political analyst who declined to be named.

For the last decade, the Nepalese monarchy has played a purely constitutional role, but has remained an influential and important symbol of continuity and

national unity in a volatile political environment.

"The future of Nepal's politics as well as the monarchy hangs in the balance," said former court judge Bhubaneshwore P. Daibagya.

"The new king will have to win the love, confidence and support of the Nepalese people like his father did. But it will be difficult."

The crisis triggered by the palace massacre could hardly have come at a worse time for Nepal, which is struggling to contain an increasingly violent Maoist insurgency that has claimed more than 1,600 lives since 1996.

"The death of the king and other royals has created an atmosphere of uncertainty," said one western diplomat.

"If that continues, it is something the Maoists may be able to take advantage of in their attempts to undermine the system."

On the political front, the ruling Nepali Congress party, while enjoying an overall parliamentary majority, is riven by internal bickering and has been rocked by well-organised opposition protests.

Landlocked between India and China, Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world and relies heavily on foreign aid and tourism for its foreign exchange.

"Nobody seems to care about the country and where it is heading," political analyst Hari C. Shrestha said.

The new king would have to negotiate some extremely sensitive hurdles, he added.

"The main question now is can the king or the regent get the necessary public support?" he said.

## Troops kill 13 Pak militants in Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Indian security personnel shot dead 13 Pakistani militants Sunday in two separate incidents in the troubled Himalayan region of Kashmir, a senior police official said.

In the first incident, personnel from the local police and the Indian army cordoned off an area in Sojayan in the border district of Poonch, 250 kilometres (155 miles) north west of Kashmir's winter capital Jammu, late Saturday night following a tip-off, the official said.

"Up to now, we have information that 10 Pakistani militants have been killed," Kamal Saini, superintendent of police in charge of Poonch district said.

"The encounter is still going on," he added.

In the second incident another group of security personnel comprising the local police and the army shot dead three Pakistani militants in Surankote, in Poonch district, Saini said.

"These operations are also continuing," he added.

## Pakistan frees 157 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan has released 157 Indian fishermen including three children who had been in prison for two years, officials said Sunday.

"Some 157 Indian fishermen and their 25 boats were released on Saturday night and they will leave (Pakistan on Monday)," Pakistan Fishermen Cooperative Society spokesman Haji Ghazanfar Ali Boota said.

The fishermen were released from prisons in this southern port city after Pakistani authorities withdrew illegal fishing charges against them on Saturday, he said.

Some 353 Indian fishermen are in Pakistani jails.

India released 160 Pakistani fishermen in April, but Boota said 229 were still in Indian prisons and New Delhi was expected to release another 63 soon.

Coastguards of the neighbouring rivals frequently arrest fishermen who stray into each other's territorial waters.

## Lanka steps up patrols to check LTTE's arms smuggling

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's navy has stepped up patrols off the island's north-eastern coast to prevent separatist Tamil Tiger rebels smuggling in arms, a press report here said Sunday.

The navy's newly acquired advanced offshore patrol vessel bought from India and another Fast Missile Vessel bought from Israel have been inducted into the patrolling operations since a week ago, the Sunday Times newspaper said.

"Operation Varuna Kirana (colourful rays), the placing of a permanent naval cordon in the north-eastern seas off Sri Lanka to prevent Tiger guerrillas from smuggling in military supplies was launched," the Times said.

## Police rebellion brews against Wahid

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's political crisis deepened Sunday as police rejected President Abdurrahman Wahid's de facto dismissal of their commander, General Suryo Bimantoro.

Wahid, who is fighting possible impeachment, relieved Bimantoro of his duties Saturday and handed them over to newly-appointed deputy police chief, Inspector General Chaeruddin Ismail.

But Jakarta Police Chief, Inspector General Sofyan Jacob, on Sunday said he and more than 100 other police generals remained loyal to Bimantoro, who has refused to resign.

## Abu Sayyaf kills 2 hostages, flees military cordon

AFP, Lamitan

Abu Sayyaf Muslim rebels killed two of the 20 hostages they abducted from a tourist resort, police said Sunday, as the guerrillas escaped a military cordon in the southern Philippines.

Both of the slain hostages were Filipinos and one of them was beheaded, said Omar Ajit Dalawis, police chief of Lamitan town in Basilan island.

The rebels escaped the cordon at Lamitan, where they had brought the 20 hostages, including three Americans, after abducting them from the western island of Palawan on May 27.

The bodies were in a "state of decomposition", he said, meaning they could have been killed on Friday, the

# Arafat orders ceasefire

## Gulf states urge US to save Palestinians

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians were playing a tense waiting game on Sunday after Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's pledge of an immediate ceasefire following the deadliest suicide bombing in Israel in years.

Israel held back from immediate retaliation for Friday night's bomb attack at a beachside nightclub in Tel Aviv that killed 19 young Israelis plus the suicide bomber but has tightened its blockade on the Palestinian territories.

For the first time since the explosion of violence eight months ago Arafat ordered his security services late Saturday to implement a "total and immediate ceasefire" on Israeli targets.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened a meeting Sunday of his inner security cabinet -- comprising Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres -- to discuss Israel's possible response to the bombing.

"What is important is not Arafat's declaration but what happens on the ground, and in one or two days we will know," Israeli minister without portfolio Danny Naveh told public television.

"I am sceptical of Arafat's true intentions and I have strong fears that this is only a new manoeuvre on his part," said Naveh, warning that if the violence persists, Israel should "put an end to its policy of restraint and treat the Palestinian Authority as a terrorist organisation."

Israelis were preparing Sunday to bury some of the victims of the bombing, which was condemned by US President George W. Bush as a "heinous terrorist attack."

The United States Saturday pressed for an end to the escalation in tele-

## Indian FM in Moscow for missile talks

AFP, Moscow

Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh was due to begin a four-day visit to Moscow Sunday amid Russian efforts to coordinate the international response to controversial US plans to build a national missile defence (NMD) system.

Singh, who is also India's defence minister, will meet his Russian counterpart Sergei Ivanov on the sidelines of the first meeting of an intergovernmental military committee set up during President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi last September.

With China, India buys some 80 percent of the four billion dollars of weapons sold each year by Russia, which is currently the world's fourth biggest arms exporter, after the United States (26 billion dollars), Britain (10 billion dollars) and France (6.6 billion dollars).

But Singh will also hold talks Monday with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov who flew to New Delhi last month immediately after US President George W. Bush announced he was going ahead with the NMD project opposed by Moscow.

## Musharraf's visit to help resolve Kashmir dispute: Vajpayee

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday said he hoped the upcoming visit by Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf to New Delhi would help solve the 54-year-old Kashmir dispute.

"I am hopeful we will find a solution to the Kashmir dispute," Vajpayee told a televised public gathering in the western Indian state of Gujarat.

"We are ready for discussions on any subject, including Kashmir," the premier said.

## Troops on alert in Assam against mosquitoes

AFP, Guabari

Indian federal troops in the oil-rich northeastern state of Assam fighting a separatist insurgency are on maximum alert to face a new challenge - from mosquitoes - a army official said Sunday.

The army in Assam has clamped strict 'sundown-sleeve-down' orders, asking its personnel to take precautions against mosquito bites.

The stringent orders came in the wake of a malaria epidemic that claimed the lives of more than 100 civilians, besides afflicting an estimated 10,000 people across Assam during the past 20 days.

"Strict anti-malaria guidelines have been enforced and those personnel not adhering to the orders will be dealt with severely," Colonel K.D. Shelly, an army commander posted at a counter-insurgency base along the India-Bhutan border, told AFP.

Punishment to offenders include pay cuts or extra work, Shelly said.

Soldiers have been advised to wear full sleeved shirts after dusk and to apply special mosquito repellent oil on exposed body parts while on duty, besides sleeping under insecticide-sprayed mosquito

phone calls from US Secretary of State Colin Powell to several world leaders, including Sharon and Arafat, a State Department official said Saturday.

"They discussed the need for an immediate and unconditional cessation of violence," the official said, and Powell "encouraged Arafat to take concrete steps to achieve that."

And as Moscow seeks to step up its role in the region, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov also made an "urgent series" of calls Sunday to Powell, Arafat and Peres.

The Israeli government authorized the security cabinet on Saturday to implement all measures it deemed necessary to counter such attacks, but Israel suspended military action after Arafat's call for a ceasefire.

"We are ready to make the utmost effort to stop the bloodbath among our people and the Israeli people, and to do whatever is necessary for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire," Arafat told reporters.

But the Israeli army reported five shooting incidents by Palestinians overnight at settlements in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as well as an army base in the southern Gaza Strip near the border with Egypt.

Meanwhile, the six monarchies of the Arabian peninsula grouped in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Sunday urged the United States to save the Palestinians.

The foreign ministers of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates called on Washington and the international community "to redouble efforts to end Israeli aggression, to lift the blockade on Palestinians and to ensure them international protection."

## Lanka sends conflicting signals on peace bid

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka was blowing hot and cold on reviving the stalled Norwegian-backed bid to broker peace as hardliners rallied to oppose political talks with Tiger rebels, official sources said Sunday.

An unnamed senior government minister proposed the temporary lifting of a ban on Tamil Tiger rebels to break the impasse in the peace process by granting the main demand of the rebels, the state-run Sunday Observer said.

"None of the other committee members attending the (ruling party meeting) had directly objected to the minister's proposal, although no final decision was taken on it," the Sunday Observer said quoting party sources.

However, President Chandrika Kumaratunga told a public rally in the central Sri Lankan town of Gampola on Friday that she will not agree to the demand of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for a de-proscription.

"We have already accepted two conditions put forward by the LTTE," the president was quoted as saying in another state run paper, the Daily News on Saturday.

would not resume dialogue until Islamabad ceased its alleged sponsorship of the armed Muslim separatist movement in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Over the past week, several senior federal ministers cautioned against too many expectations from the proposed Vajpayee-Musharraf summit.

Addressing reporters in New Delhi last Monday, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh said he approached the talks "with realism."

"It is a long road to walk together again," he said.

