



A protester (C), one of fifteen arrested, shouts anti-Monarch slogans during a protest marking the 54th National Democracy Day in Kathmandu yesterday. King Gyanendra dissolved the four-party coalition government and grabbed the executive power, followed by the declaration of a state of emergency in the country on February 1.

Nepal faces int'l military aid cut, says US, UK

Nepalis marks democracy day under emergency

AFP, Washington/ Kathmandu

Nepal faces a freeze in international military aid if its king, who has seized absolute power, does not restore fundamental rights to the people within the coming weeks, the United States and United Kingdom warned yesterday.

After recalling their ambassadors to their capitals to protest King Gyanendra's power grab, the United States, European nations and India could "seriously consider" cutting off vital military aid to the Himalayan outpost, US envoy to Nepal James Moriarty told reporters in Washington.

"I can't lock us in on that but I can tell you that that will be a step that we will

seriously consider," Moriarty said.

He did not elaborate on the prospective military aid cut, which analysts say could considerably weaken King Gyanendra's uphill battle against a bloody Maoist insurgency that has left 11,000 people dead so far.

"No, I am not going to be too much more specific but to say that I think security assistance, in particular lethal security assistance, will be at risk if you don't see progress on the king's commitments," Moriarty said.

He said Gyanendra's administration had given an assurance it would emerge with a plan to address two key concerns - insurgency and the restoration of full multiparty democracy - within 100 days.

Britain is considering suspending military aid to Nepal if King Gyanendra does not reverse his power seizure, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said yesterday.

"We are giving the proposal active consideration," Straw told reporters when asked about a call by London-based human rights group Amnesty International for Britain, the United States and India to suspend military aid to Nepal.

The three countries are the main suppliers of military aid to Nepal's government, which is seeking to crush a nine-year uprising by Maoist rebels that has cost over 11,000 lives.

Despite the pledge, the United

States, European Union (EU) members and India, all of which have been key backers of Nepal's drive to crush the Maoist insurgents, recalled their envoys this week to rebuff the monarch's actions.

He had sacked the government, appointed a pro-royalist cabinet headed by himself, set aside multi-party democracy that was introduced in 1990 and suspended civil liberties, including press freedom.

The king justified the royal take-over by saying it was needed to restore peace and security since political parties were not able to stem Nepal's communist insurgency.

'1,000 Afghan children feared dead in cold snap'

AFP, Kabul

Aid workers in Afghanistan said yesterday they feared up to 1,000 children may have died from cold and malnutrition during severe winter weather affecting the west of the war-shattered country.

"Several hundred to a thousand would be a low estimate of the number of children that could have died," Paul Hicks, program director western region Afghanistan for Catholic Relief Services, told AFP.

Western Ghor province has been hit hard by snowstorms in Afghanistan's worst winter for more than a decade and most of the province remains out of reach of humanitarian aid and blanketed by snow.

Protester throws shoe at former Pentagon adviser

AP, Portland

Howard Dean, the newly minted leader of the Democratic Party, and former Pentagon adviser Richard Perle made clear their opposing views on the war in Iraq during a debate marred by a protester who tossed a shoe at Perle.

Perle had just started his comments Thursday when a protester threw a shoe at him before being dragged away, screaming, "Liar! Liar!"

Perle, who was Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's top policy adviser, was a key architect of the US-led invasion of Iraq, and Dean is among the war's most prominent opponents.

2 Sunni rebels blow themselves up in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Two Sunni Muslim militants blew themselves to bits with a hand grenade after a gunbattle with Pakistani police, while 50 suspects were arrested in a separate incident, officials said yesterday.

Security forces across Pakistan are on high alert ahead of processions by the minority Shia community to mark Ashura, the mourning ceremony for the grandson of the prophet Mohammed. It has been hit by violence in the past.

'Jihadis to come to power if Musharraf is removed'

ANI, New York

Top US intelligence officials have said that "extremist Islamic politicians would gain greater influence" in Pakistan if Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf is assassinated or replaced.

"If Musharraf was assassinated or otherwise replaced, Pakistan's new leader would be less pro-US," the Director of the US Defence Intelligence Agency Vice Admiral Lowell Jacoby as saying.

He said that it was also a matter of concern that majority of the population in Pakistan held a favourable view of terror mastermind and al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

"We are concerned that extremist Islamic politicians would gain greater influence. Majority of population in Pakistan holds favourable view of Osama bin Laden," he added.

He said that though no assassination attempts have been made on Musharraf's life since December 2003, Musharraf was still at high risk of assassination.

"Our assessment remains unchanged from last year. The Prime Minister and a corps commander have been the targets of assassination attempts since last summer. President Musharraf remains at high risk of assassination, although no known attempts on his life have occurred since December 2003," The Nation

further quoted him as saying.

He further added that Pakistan had very tactfully launched military offensives in the tribal regions against suspected al-Qaeda terrorists and remnants of the Taliban militia believed to be holed up in the Wana region, while at the same time entering into negotiations with the tribal leaders to thwart any backlash because of the offensive.

"Pakistan significantly increased its military operations and pacification efforts in tribal areas along the Afghanistan border in 2004. The operation affected al-Qaeda, Taliban and other groups by disrupting safe-havens and, in some cases, forcing them back into Afghanistan where they are vulnerable to Coalition (US and its allies in Afghanistan) operations. Pakistan also secured agreements with several tributes by successfully balancing military action with negotiations and rewards to encourage cooperation and limit backlash. Pakistan must maintain and expand these operations in order to permanently disrupt insurgent and terrorist activity. The economy has displayed strong growth over the past two years. Unless Musharraf is assassinated, Pakistan will remain stable through the year; further political and economic reforms is needed to continue positive trends beyond that time," he concluded.

Cocktail parties behind bars land Indian MP in Tihar Jail

AFP, New Delhi

A parliament member is being shifted from a provincial prison to India's maximum-security one yesterday to put a stop to lavish luxuries he enjoyed behind bars in the lawless state of Bihar, jail officials said.

Pappu Yadav of Bihar's ruling RJD party would be lodged in New Delhi's federal Tihar prison after a court ordered an end to the privileges he enjoyed on his home turf, they said.

Portly Yadav, convicted by a Bihar court in a murder case, is known to enjoy special privileges not only because of his political profile but because he allegedly controls a private army in his strong-hold district.

India's Supreme Court Monday ordered Bihar's state administration to send Yadav to Tihar after federal detectives said the politician was holding lavish cocktail parties and well-attended political meetings inside the prison in Bihar's capital Patna.

Jailors in Tihar, which houses scores of Islamic guerrillas from Kashmir and tribal rebels, said Yadav will be housed in the prison's maximum-security quarters where inmates face near isolation with only the most basic of facilities.

US army files detail prison abuse cases

American troops destroyed Afghan prison abuse pictures to avert embarrassment

REUTERS, Washington

An Iraqi prisoner stated US forces beat him with a baseball bat, broke his nose and dislocated his arms, then coerced him to drop an abuse claim to gain his release, Army files made public yesterday showed.

In another case, US troops in Afghanistan posed for photos of mock executions with hooded and bound prisoners, but other pictures depicting abuse were destroyed to avert another public embarrassment after the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal surfaced in April 2004, the files stated.

Several Army Criminal Investigation Command files released by the American Civil Liberties Union detailed previously unknown detainee abuse allegations. The documents were obtained from the government under court order through the Freedom of Information Act.

"These documents provide more evidence that abuse was not localised or aberrational, but was widespread and systemic. They also provide further evidence that at least in some cases the government is not aggressively investigating credible allegations of abuse,"

ACLU lawyer Jameel Jaffer said.

"Simply put, we are accountable. We will take action and investigate when it (abuse) is reported. We take it seriously. And we'll bring those soldiers to justice who may have committed an offense," said Army spokesman Col. Joe Curtin.

An Iraqi taken into US custody in Tikrit when his house was raided in September 2003 said Americans, some in civilian clothing, beat him repeatedly, one file showed.

He stated Americans struck him in the head with a rifle, beat him in the stomach, smacked his leg with a baseball bat, dislocated his arms, stepped on his nose and broke it, shoved an unloaded pistol in his mouth and pulled the trigger, and choked him with a rope.

While abusing him, the man stated, a US interrogator demanded he confess to crimes and told him, "Today will be the last day in your life."

The file included medical reports confirming he suffered a broken nose, broken leg and abdominal scars. US soldiers questioned in the case said personnel from Task Force 20, a combined CIA-military unit hunting "high-value" fugitives, had interrogated him.



PHOTO: AP

In this undated file photo obtained by ABC news and allegedly taken by Sgt. Charles Frederick, Sgt. Charles Graner, of the 372nd Military Police Company, poses with the body of Iraqi detainee Manadel al-Jamadi who is packed in ice at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, Iraq. Al-Jamadi was captured by SEALs during a joint CIA-special operations mission in November 2003. He died a few hours later under CIA interrogation in the shower room at Abu Ghraib prison.

Badawi, Musharraf talk restructuring of OIC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Visiting Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi met President Pervez Musharraf and exchanged views on bilateral and regional matters and the restructuring of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), reports Online newsagency.

During Badawi's meeting with Musharraf at the Aiwan-e-Sadr Thursday, the leaders agreed that restructuring of the OIC was "inevitable" to face current challenges.

Musharraf said both countries could play a vital role in strengthening OIC by boosting bilateral economic and trade ties.

According to Online, the Malaysian premier supported Pakistan on its Kashmir stand and welcomed peace talks between Pakistan and India.

Musharraf discussed the ongoing

composite dialogue process between Pakistan and India.

Both leaders also underscored the need for pursuing "enlightened moderation" to remove the "misperception between Islam and the West".

President Musharraf stressed the importance of Malaysia in the Asean (Association of South East Asian Nations) region saying that stronger relations between both countries would make the organisation more vibrant.

Badawi lauded the economic policies being pursued by Pakistan and said his country was keen to expand relations in all sectors.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was also present on the occasion.

Earlier, the two countries agreed on mutual investment in power, water, construction and electricity transmission sectors and to reduce the current trade imbalance between the two countries.

Iran has no nukes, says Putin

REUTERS, AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that recent moves by Iran showed it did not possess nuclear weapons and he said Moscow would continue nuclear cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

Speaking after talks with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Hassan Rohani, Putin said: "The latest steps from Iran confirm that Iran does not have nuclear weapons and we will continue to develop relations in all sectors, including peaceful atomic energy."

Russia however was "deeply convinced that the proliferation of nuclear arms on the planet does not contribute to security either for the region or the world," Putin said.

"We hope that Iran will strictly respect all commitments its has made bilaterally

with Russia and internationally," the Russian president stated.

Rowhani said Russia had a role of "great importance" to play in resolving the dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

Putin said he had been invited by the Iranian leadership to visit Tehran and was "preparing for this visit," Interfax news agency reported.

Dates for Putin's trip to Iran would be set later, he said.

Putin's meeting with Rowhani came a day after both countries announced that a crucial agreement obliging Iran to return all spent nuclear fuel to Russia would be signed on February 26.

An agreement on the return to Russia of spent nuclear fuel has been the key impediment to completion of an 800-million-dollar project led by Russia to build the plant in

Bushehr, southern Iran.

Moscow and the West both fear Iran could reprocess the spent fuel delivered from Russia by upgrading it through centrifuges to either make a weak "dirty bomb" or an actual nuclear weapon.

The United States and Israel had jointly launched an international campaign against the Bushehr project, but Moscow countered that it would make sure the plant remained harmless to protect its own security interests.

Tehran has in the past used various arguments to avoid signing the agreement. It has said the material was too volatile and dangerous to transport back to Russia and also that Moscow was charging too much for the fuel itself.

The United States accuses Iran of using atomic energy as a cover for weapons development, a charge Tehran denies.

Shias take reins of power

Killing goes on in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Intense political wrangling gathered pace in Iraq after certified election results put Shias in power for the first time and the country was wracked by continued killings and fears of more kidnapping.

In a gathering marking the first of two days of mourning in the Shia commemoration ceremony of Ashura, thousands of Shias on Friday put on a show of force in central Baghdad, harangued by the man who led their winning religious ticket in the polls.

Sayed Abdelaziz Hakim, the black-turbaned cleric who heads the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), addressed thousands of supporters before Friday prayers, at a gathering unthinkable two years ago.

He accused the police of having

tortured to death three members of his party's officially disbanded militia, the Badr organisation.

"Three days ago, some criminals of the previous regime who were brought back to the police apparatus, committed an ignominious crime against three members of Badr organisation," he said.

The United Iraqi Alliance, grouping SCIRI and several other Shia religious parties, was blessed by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and swept to victory in the January 30 general elections.

Horse-trading for the top jobs has already started but, in a sign of the strains the election alliance, and the second-placed Kurds, could face in the future, little appears yet to have been decided.

Away from the politicians' con-claves, the violence that has scarred the country since the US-

led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein in April 2003, continued.

Twelve Iraqis and a US soldier have died in insurgent violence since Thursday evening, security sources said.

Most of the violence targeted Iraqi security forces north of Baghdad, while south of the capital the bodies of two kidnapped sons of Najaf's police chief were found.

"The bodies of Haidar and Baha al-Jazaeri were found at 10 am (0700 GMT) in Hindiya district, 10 kilometres (six miles) north of Karbala," a police source said. "The two bodies had their hands tied and were riddled with bullets."

Two Indonesian journalists were feared kidnapped by insurgents in western Iraq on Friday, disappearing from the notoriously dangerous road linking the Jordan and Iraqi capitals.

Tigers reject UN charges over child soldiers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels said yesterday a United Nations report saying that the guerrilla movement had recruited more than 4,700 children since 2001 was false.

"We totally reject the accusations levelled against us about recruiting children for war," the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan said on the Tamil nitharsanam.com website.

Thamilselvan said the UN should send a representative to discuss the issue with them.

"We believe the United Nations would study them (the allegations) and take a fair decision. We are prepared to join and work with any organisation that is acting in a practical manner for the welfare of our children," he said.

Thamilselvan said if children volunteered for enlistment were

underage, they were returned to their parents. "As far as we are concerned, those coming forward to join our ranks, if they are found to be children, are sent back to their parents," he said.

His remarks came ahead of a debate next Wednesday in the UN Security Council on Secretary General Kofi Annan's report on children. The LTTE is included in a list of groups that could face sanctions, including a travel ban.

Annan's allegations about the Tigers' child recruitment came in a report entitled "Children and Armed Conflict."

"The LTTE has often carried out recruitment by force, abducting children while on their way to school or during religious festivities, and beating families and teachers who resisted the seizure of the children," Annan said.

Palestinian deportees allowed to go home

Israel stops razing Palestinian homes

AP, REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israel allowed 16 Palestinians expelled from the West Bank during the uprising to return to their homes and concluded that demolishing the homes of Palestinian suicide bombers and gunmen does not deter attackers and should be stopped.

Both decisions were in keeping with concessions Israel made to the Palestinians at a summit earlier this month where both sides declared an end to four years of hostilities.

On Sunday, the Israeli Cabinet is set to vote on a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements this summer. Easy passage is expected.

A Palestinian negotiator told Israel Radio on Friday that the pullout would not take place under

Palestinian fire but called on Israel to evacuate a military patrol road between Egypt and Gaza that was one of the deadliest spots during the hostilities.

The Cabinet is also expected to vote Sunday on a revised route of the barrier Israel is building to separate it from the West Bank. The modified route hews closer to Israel's border before the 1967 Mideast war but puts two major West Bank settlement blocs near Jerusalem on the Israeli side of the barrier.

Israel has destroyed about 2,475 Palestinian homes as a punitive measure since it captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war, including 675 in the past four years of fighting, according to the Israeli human rights group

B'Tselem.

House demolitions, along with other army practices such as targeted killings of Palestinian militants, were suspended after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (news - web sites) and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas declared a truce earlier this month. On Thursday, they were discontinued as a matter of policy.

The military has concluded that now that things are quieter, "it's not the time to use this policy," a military official said on condition of anonymity.

Human rights groups have condemned the demolitions as collective punishment and demanded for years that they be halted.