

Nepali leaders demand restoration of civil rights

Cautious reaction to lifting of emergency

PTI, Kathmandu

Top political leaders of Nepal yesterday demanded King Gyanendra to release political prisoners and fully restore fundamental rights and press freedom, while welcoming the royal government's lifting of emergency.

The leaders expressed doubts about Friday night's government announcement of lifting of emergency, as press censorship has not been lifted yet and hundreds of political prisoners were still in detention. When contacted, government officials refused to comment on these issues.

"The announcement to lift state of emergency is a positive step but this is not enough," said acting general secretary of the Nepal Communist Party (UML) Jhalanath

Khanal.

The government should immediately release all the political prisoners, human rights activists and journalists and restore fundamental rights of the people, he said.

"An atmosphere should be created to allow smooth and unobstructed functioning of political parties and press freedom should be restored," Khanal said.

Press freedom has not yet been restored even after lifting the emergency, said Bishnu Nishthuri, General Secretary of Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ).

"The government's policy towards the press has not yet changed, there is still widespread control in media," he said.

"Journalists are not free to report the truth, there is restriction on reporting", he added.

Three journalists, who were detained after the imposition of emergency, are still in jail, he informed.

Travel restriction imposed on political activists and others has not yet been withdrawn, he said.

"The King should return sovereign power to the people and a dialogue should be initiated with political parties to move the country towards full-fledged democracy," Khanal said.

Welcoming the King's announcement Nepal Congress (Democratic) acting President Gopal Man Shrestha said the Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC) formed by the King to grill his opponents should be abolished with the termination of emergency.

The King should return all executive powers he had assumed by

imposing emergency rule and the constitutional should be reactivated, he said.

Meanwhile, Nepalese political leaders here yesterday reacted cautiously to King Gyanendra's decision to lift emergency in the Himalayan kingdom, saying the move was prompted by international and domestic pressure.

"Lifting of emergency, to some extent, is really good but we still have to wait and watch. The emergency has been lifted because of international and national pressure which the King could not withstand," Nepali Congress leader Shekhar Koirala said here.

He said the decision was "meaningless" until political prisoners were released, press censorship removed and telecommunications facilities restored.



A Nepalese devotee (L) prays next to policemen standing guard at the Indrachowk market place, in Kathmandu Saturday. Nepali King Gyanendra lifted yesterday a state of emergency he clamped on the Himalayan kingdom when he grabbed power three months ago after coming under heavy world pressure to restore democracy.

India welcomes Nepali king's move but wants more steps

PTI, New Delhi

Reacting cautiously to lifting of three-month emergency in Nepal, India yesterday described it as the "first step" towards the restoration of multi-party democracy which still required immediate release of political prisoners and other measures to be taken.

"We, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and myself, had conveyed to King Gyanendra that political processes should be restored, political prisoners should be released, emergency should be lifted and Indian channels should be allowed to be aired and processes should be started which culminate in multi-party elections," External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh told reporters here while commenting on the developments in Nepal.

"This is the first step," he said.

External Affairs Ministry spokesman said India wanted to see release of all political leaders still in custody and the restoration of civil liberties which could open the way for reconciliation between the two constitutional forces.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz (R) and his Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi listen to the national anthems during a ceremony at Aziz's residence in Islamabad Saturday. Koizumi began a visit to Pakistan for talks on counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, UN reforms and a new phase in bilateral economic and political relations.

Koizumi talks UN reform, non-proliferation with Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi held talks here yesterday with President Pervez Musharraf on non-proliferation, counter terrorism and UN reforms at the start of a visit expected to mark a new phase in economic and political ties.

As the two met Japanese diplomats said Tokyo was keen to have an update on Pakistan's investigation into the dismantled nuclear proliferation network of country's disgraced nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan.

The diplomats said Tokyo would like to be "updated" on the extent of Khan's involvement with North Korea when he ran the illegal network to sell nuclear secrets to other countries.

Pakistan has said it fully supports a nuclear free Korean peninsula and a reduction of tensions in the far east.

Officials said Musharraf and Koizumi spoke together for 20 minutes and continued the discus-

sion later at a working luncheon.

Koizumi, who flew here after two nights in India where he pledged closer economic and security ties, was to hold formal talks focusing on bilateral trade and economic relations with Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz later in the day.

Details of the Musharraf-Koizumi meeting were not immediately available but a Japanese diplomat said Tokyo wanted to raise relations with Pakistan to the level of a strategic partnership.

"There is going to be a joint declaration that will mark a new phase of strategic relations between Japan and Pakistan," the diplomat said.

During his visit, the first by a Japanese prime minister in five years, Koizumi is expected to announce a resumption of yen-denominated loans, suspended by Tokyo in 1998 after Pakistan conducted nuclear tests.

Before the tests, carried out in response to similar trials by India, Japan had given Islamabad 500

million dollars annually in development aid.

Koizumi will oversee the signing of three agreements including grants worth 87 million dollars for a water purification project and an irrigation scheme.

The two sides will also conclude a technical cooperation agreement.

"This is a very important visit. We have enjoyed close friendly relations with Japan which is a major trading and investment partner with Pakistan," Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Jalil Abbas Jilani told AFP.

The Japanese leader's regional tour is seen as a diplomatic thrust by Tokyo to consolidate links with India and Pakistan to counter-balance China's growing influence in the region.

Pakistan is a close ally of China which is building a deep sea port at southwestern Gwadar town and has agreed to help construct a second nuclear power station in the country.

Veto power not to be hindrance, says Japan

PTI, United Nations

Japan has rejected a suggestion that it has made a mistake by aligning itself with India, Germany and Brazil in its bid for a permanent seat in an expanded Security Council, but indicated it might not insist on a veto right enjoyed by the current permanent members.

India, Japan, Germany and Brazil, who are strong contenders for UNSC permanent seats, have formed what is called Group of Four (G4) to jointly push for expansion in the permanent category and support one another's case.

Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura, now in the United States to lobby his country's case, replied in a firm "no" when asked at press conference on Friday, if Japan's chances would have been greater had it gone alone as the United States openly supports only Tokyo.

He did not think that going it alone would have improved Japan's chances and said G-4 is likely to become G-6, when Africans agree on their two candidates. Japan, he said, was not so egoistic as to ignore the realities, expressing the view that joint effort is better than going it alone.

'Time has come for Japan, India to renew Asian identity'

PTI, New Delhi

Declaring that time has come for Japan and India to renew and reinvigorate "our Asian identity, building on the commonalities of our interests, aspirations and values," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh tonight said it was an opportune moment to build on past history of very cordial bilateral interaction.

Speaking at a banquet hosted in honour of visiting Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi here, he said "it is thus only befitting that we have decided during your visit to add a new strategic focus to our Global Partnership and to deepen and widen our cooperation in the New Asian Era. We see this as a many-layered initiative encompassing diverse areas of our interaction."

Recalling the supportive role played by Japan in 1991 to tide over India's economic crisis when he (Manmohan Singh) was Finance Minister, Singh said "it was as a result of such friendly support that India was able to emerge from the crisis and to subsequently embark

on the path of economic reform that has changed the face of the economy."

"We want to reduce the psychological and other barriers that prevent fuller exploitation of the immense potential that lies untapped in our economies," he said.

The Prime Minister said that though both nations had gone through various phases in their relationship, "in times of difficulty, we have stood by each other. It is important to recall that India refused to attend the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951 and signed a separate Peace Treaty with Japan in 1952.

"This Pandit Nehru felt, gave to Japan a proper position of honour and equality among the comity of free nations. In that Peace Treaty, India waived all reparation claims against Japan," Singh said.

The dissenting judgement of Justice Radha Binod Pal is well-known to the Japanese people and it would always symbolise the affection and regard "our people have for your country," the Prime Minister said.

China arrests hundreds of petitioners ahead of new law: Rights group

AFP, Beijing

China has arrested hundreds of petitioners ahead of a new law going into effect which aims to keep people with complaints about injustices from flooding the capital, a US-based human rights group said.

Sources in China told Human Rights in China that hundreds of petitioners have been rounded up, detained and beaten in Beijing, Shanghai and northeastern China, the rights group said in a statement seen yesterday.

In one incident in Beijing Wednesday, dozens of petitioners from Shanghai were reportedly surrounded by more than 100 police officers as they left their hostel for the State Councils office in Beijing which handles complaints, HRIC said.

Police reportedly forced the petitioners into waiting vehicles and transported them to a place called Majialou, where more than 600 other petitioners from places such as Liaoning and Jilin provinces and Shanghai city were already being

held, the statement said.

The new group of petitioners were released the next day and sent back to Shanghai by train.

According to HRICs sources, a group of more than 200 petitioners from Shanghai boarded a Beijing-bound train on April 24, only to encounter more than 100 police officers and officials who detained them as soon as the train left the station.

When the train reached a city that evening, police and officials reportedly removed more than 70 of the petitioners from the train, beating some.

Most of the Shanghai petitioners detained in Beijing were petitioning over the loss of their homes in government-approved redevelopment projects.

The petitioners said that during their most recent detention in Beijing, they were obliged to submit to being photographed and produce other evidence before they were given anything to eat, HRIC said.



IRAQI PRISON ABUSE Lynndie England to plead guilty

AP, San Antonio

Pfc. Lynndie England, the Army reservist shown in some of the most notorious photos in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, will plead guilty to abusing Iraqi detainees in a case that sparked global outrage against the United States and its military.

England, 22, faces a maximum sentence of 11 years in prison as part of the plea deal, which still must be accepted by a military judge, her attorney, Rick Hernandez, said Friday. She had been facing up to 16 years.

The plea deal came four days before England was scheduled to go on trial in a military court in Fort Hood.

Insurgent attacks kill 10 Iraqis, 4 GIs

Neighbours fear Iraq tension to spread

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents launched fresh attacks in Baghdad and northern Iraq on Saturday, killing at least 10 Iraqis and wounding more than 30, officials said, in a second day of violence aimed at shaking the country's newly formed government.

Four US soldiers were killed and two wounded by a roadside bomb near the Syrian border, and four American soldiers were injured when their Humvee crashed during a night-time operation west of Baghdad, the US military said yesterday.

Elsewhere, Iraq's neighbours met in Turkey yesterday to praise the formation of Iraq's new government.

At a meeting of Iraq's neighbors in Turkey, meanwhile, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the violence was "not solely the concern of the Iraqis but ours as well."

Fears that the ethnic tensions and violence in Iraq will spread beyond its borders brought foreign ministers from neighbouring coun-

tries to Turkey for talks yesterday

Turkey's prime minister opened the conference in a former Ottoman palace saying Iraq's stability is "not solely the concern of the Iraqis but ours as well." Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were represented as was Egypt.

Some of the worst attacks occurred in the capital, still reeling from Friday's onslaught in which at least 17 bombs exploded in Iraq, killing 50 people, including three US soldiers.

A suicide car bomb exploded Saturday near the offices of the National Dialogue Council, a coalition of 10 Sunni Arab factions that had been negotiating for a stake in Iraq's new Shia-dominated government. The blast killed two Iraqi civilians and wounded 18, police said.

Another suicide car bomb targeting an Iraqi army patrol exploded Saturday near the Mohammad Rasoul Allah Mosque in eastern Baghdad, killing two Iraqi women and a girl, and seriously wounding four soldiers, police Lt. Col. Ahmed Abboud Effait said.

Photo of planet outside solar system

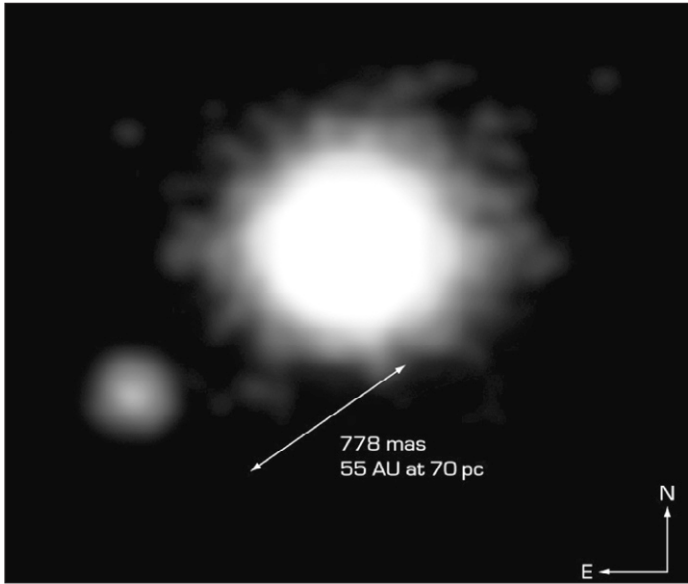


PHOTO: AFP

This picture released by the European Southern Observatory (ESO) shows the first planet outside of our solar system to be pictured orbiting a brown dwarf at a distance that is nearly twice as far as Neptune is from the sun. The planet, known as an exoplanet, is five times bigger and 10 times hotter than the biggest planet in our solar system, Jupiter.