

MOVE TO RESTORE DEMOCRACY

# Nepali parties forging common front

Arms supplies 'under constant review,' says India

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's opposition parties are close to forming a common front to push for the restoration of democracy three months after King Gyanendra seized power, a communist party official said yesterday.

The plan under discussion by the seven parties focusses on proposals to seek restoration of parliament, Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist spokesman Pradip Nepal (NCP-UML) said.

"Our party is for reinstating parliament and the rest of the parties are in the process of agreeing to the common minimum programme," he told AFP.

"All the parties will meet soon to finalise it," he said.

Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party chairman Narayan Man Bijukchhe said all parties had agreed to call for restoring parliament rather than new elections.

Another NCP-UML senior official said restoration of parliament,

dissolved in 2002, could pave the way for dialogue with Maoist rebels who have been battling to overthrow the monarchy and install a communist republic since 1996.

The efforts by the long divided parties to strike an alliance follow Gyanendra's dismissal of the government and takeover of power February 1.

Gyanendra said he took power to tackle the increasingly deadly revolt after fractious parties failed to contain it.

The common front would be made up of the Nepali Congress, Nepali Congress (Democratic), Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist, People's Front Nepal, Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party, Nepal Sadbhawana Party-Anandadevi and United Left Front, Nepal said.

The other senior NCP-UML official, who did not wish to be named, said restoring parliament would pave the way for "an all-party government capable of holding peace talks with the rebels."

"Such a government will also explore the possibility of inviting the rebels to join the interim government to hold parliamentary elections or elections for a constituent assembly," the official said.

The Maoists have been calling for elections for a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution and settle the political role of the king.

Meanwhile, India is keeping under constant review the issue of resuming arms supplies to Nepal, suspended since February when King Gyanendra seized power, a report said yesterday.

"The supply of arms to Nepal is under constant review," Foreign Minister Natwar Singh told The Hindu newspaper in an interview.

India is Nepal's biggest arms supplier.

"Given the nature of our very close relations with Nepal, we have to be extremely cautious and very patient. It's our hope and endeavour to see that normalcy returns," Singh added.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh (L) and Vice-Chancellor of Viswa Bharati University, Sujit Basu pose with the Nobel medal replica during the function of the Replacement of the Nobel Medallion at Shantiniketan, about 200 kms north of Kolkata Saturday. The Nobel medal of Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, was stolen from the museum at the university last year.

## Asem ministers urge N Korea to resume talks

### 'Lack of Asian pressure stymies progress in Myanmar'

REUTERS, AFP, Kyoto

Asian and European foreign ministers urged North Korea yesterday to return to talks on its nuclear arms programme "without any further delay" as concerns grew that Pyongyang was preparing for an atomic test.

Nearly a year has passed since a third round of six-country talks on the crisis ended inconclusively in Beijing.

North Korea declared in February that it possessed nuclear arms and would stay away from the talks indefinitely -- a matter the foreign ministers said was a cause for "deep concern."

"(The ministers) strongly urged the DPRK (North Korea) to return to the negotiating table of the six-party talks without any further delay, and to make a strategic decision so as to achieve the denuclearisation of the (Korean) peninsula in a peaceful manner through dialogue," said a chairman's statement issued at the

end of a two-day Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem).

Asem, one of the few international groupings not to include the United States, comprises 38 countries accounting for 60 percent of world trade.

A third round of nuclear talks among the two Koreas, the United States, Japan, Russia and China took place in June 2004.

Meanwhile, European efforts to secure the freedom of Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi are being undermined by a lack of political pressure from Asian nations, a European official said Saturday.

The European Union used a meeting of Asian and European foreign ministers in Kyoto, Japan to demand the military junta release Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and free 19 political prisoners.

But a senior European official regretted that Asian nations were not applying similar pressure.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during the inauguration of a memorial to India's second prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri during the Lal Bahadur Shastri Birth Centenary Celebrations in New Delhi Saturday. The typical Lutyen's bungalow which forms the memorial, was the home of Shastri for many years, and depicts the life and times of the former prime minister.

## LTTE poses threat to Indian security: Delhi

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas may be taking part in the Norway-backed peace process but they remain "one of the deadliest terrorist organisations in the world", the Indian government says.

The Home Ministry's annual report for 2004-05 says that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) demand that its naval unit should be treated on a par with the Indian and Sri Lankan navies was a "threat to Indian security".

"The LTTE continues to be an extremely potent, most lethal and well organised terrorist force in Sri Lanka and has strong connections in Tamil Nadu and certain pockets of southern India," the report said in a brief but hard-hitting section on the Tamil Tigers.

"The organisation assiduously cultivates Tamil chauvinist elements who are inspired by the Tamil Eelam concept of a separate Tamil Nadu, i.e., secession from India.

"The LTTE, by carrying out

several successful suicide killing missions in Sri Lanka and one in India, has emerged as one of the deadliest terrorist organisations in the world, which has sympathisers, supporters and agents on the Indian soil."

The report's reference was to the May 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at an election rally at Sriperumbudur near Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

The LTTE initially vehemently denied any involvement in the grotesque killing but in recent times has hinted that it would like New Delhi to adopt a forget-and-forgive attitude.

New Delhi outlawed the LTTE in 1992 and has renewed the ban every two years. The ban was last renewed in August 2004.

The home ministry report said: "Notwithstanding the current peace process, the LTTE is yet to give up violence as a means to achieve its goal of establishing a separate homeland for Tamils."



PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush (C), First Lady Laura Bush (2nd L) and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (L) cross their hearts during the US National Anthem as Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga (2nd R) and her husband Imants Freibergs look on during a wreath laying ceremony at the Latvian Freedom Monument Saturday in Riga, Latvia.

## Baghdad residents enraged as new car bomb kills 17

AFP, REUTERS, Baghdad

Exasperation was growing among Baghdad residents yesterday after the latest in an unprecedented string of car bomb attacks killed 17 people, mostly civilians, in central Baghdad.

Four American security guards were among the victims of the huge blast, which also left 33 wounded, including several schoolgirls whose bus was caught up in the massive explosion.

"According to the latest toll, there are 13 Iraqi civilians killed and four foreigners whose bodies were completely charred," an interior ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

"According to the badges we found, they are Americans," said medic Khaled Ibrahim. A US officer

on the scene confirmed to AFP that the four were US citizens.

A car bomb parked on Baghdad's busy Tahrir Square went off at 11:05 am (0705 GMT) and struck a convoy of sports utility vehicles, of a sort widely used to escort prominent Iraqis or foreigners.

The explosion shook central Baghdad and sent a huge mushroom of smoke billowing into the sky. It was so powerful it sent two civilian cars flying over a wall. The vehicles came crashing down at the entrance of a tunnel.

"They were not heading down into the tunnel but the force of the explosion propelled them over the wall," said a witness.

The bodies of the four foreigners, presumed to be security guards, were completely charred inside the wreckage of their vehicles.

"True it was a US target, but what about civilians? They are innocent. We helped rescue about 15 schoolgirls, three of them were badly wounded," said witness Ahmed Ghanem Yehya.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast, the latest in a string of car bombs and other insurgent attacks that have killed some 300 people already this month.

Shots were fired as chaos filled the busy square, which commands access to the Jumhuriya bridge leading to the fortified Green Zone administrative enclave.

Police and foreign security guards secured the area, as ambulances rushed the wounded to nearby hospitals. A man could be seen trying to crack open the door of a damaged vehicle with a sledgehammer to extract its occupant.