

Nepali Maoists heal rift

Rebels bomb top textile factory, causing its closure

BBC ONLINE, AFP, Kathmandu

A senior Maoist leader in Nepal has been reinstated after several months of suspension caused by major differences with the top leader, Prachanda.

The second highest ranking leader of the Maoist communist party, Baburam Bhattarai, has now been re-nominated to the party's top body.

Prachanda said the move was aimed at uniting various factions in the party.

The rebels have been trying to woo mainstream political parties opposed to King Gyanendra's seizure of power.

Prachanda delivered news of Bhattarai's reinstatement in an e-mailed statement on Monday.

Prachanda, chairman of the Maoist communist party, said Bhattarai had been re-inducted into the politburo special committee.

Bhattarai is the second-in-command who led Maoist negotiators in failed peace talks with the government in 2003.

Two of Bhattarai's key support-

ers, Ashok and Rahul, have also been reinstated.

They were all suspended earlier this year following policy differences.

Bhattarai is known to back an alliance with the political parties who have been at loggerheads with the king over his seizure of direct rule five months ago.

Such an alliance could pose a serious challenge to the monarchy, which the rebels want to overthrow.

Prachanda earlier this month offered to hold talks with the political parties.

The parties have, however, insisted that the rebels first renounce violence before any negotiations.

At a joint meeting on Monday, the parties reiterated that the rebels must create an atmosphere of trust ahead of any dialogue.

There has been no immediate response from the rebels.

But Bhattarai's reinstatement appears to be aimed at appeasing the mainstream parliamentary parties.

Prachanda said the move was

aimed at bolstering the fight against what he said was feudal autocracy.

About 12,000 people have died in 10 years of Maoist rebellion.

Meanwhile, Maoist rebels attacked Nepal's largest textile factory with homemade bombs and forced it to close down after the company refused to pay bribes, army and company officials said Monday.

The attack by 20 armed men happened Saturday at Sunsari, 460km southeast of Kathmandu, officials said. No one was injured.

An army official estimated damage at 350 million Nepalese rupees (4.9 million dollars), with the factory now closed for several weeks.

"The closure has adversely affected more than 2,600 labourers working in different shifts," said the army official, who declined to be named.

The Reliance Spinning Mills, owned by Nepali investors, ships cotton yarn products to India. The 2.8 billion rupee factory started operations in 1995.

The bombs were hurled at different locations around the factory and

destroyed several buildings after the rebels overpowered security guards, a company official said.

"The Maoist rebels detonated locally-made bombs at different sections of the mill, causing a heavy loss of property including machinery of the mill," said D.P. Mishra, chief executive at the plant.

Mishra said that before the attack, the rebels had demanded several million rupees in "donations" for their party but the management had refused to pay.

"If we had paid the money to the rebels we would have been arrested for financially aiding the rebels," Mishra said. "But our mill was attacked for our refusal to pay."

Maoist rebels routinely levy charges on tourists and businesses in the territory they control in the Himalayan kingdom and have stepped up attacks since King Gyanendra seized power in February.

The king said the move was needed to crush the insurgency, which has claimed around 12,000 lives since 1996.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) and his wife Gursharan Kaur review the honour guard upon their arrival at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington Sunday. Manmohan Singh is on a three-day official visit to the US.

Sectarian violence kills 6 in Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

A Sunni Muslim scholar was killed and his cleric father was wounded when gunmen ambushed their car in the southern city of Karachi while five others died in suspected sectarian violence elsewhere in Pakistan, police said yesterday.

Mufti Mohammad Ahmed Madani, a teacher at a local religious school, was wounded when assailants riding a motorbike sprayed his car with bullets late Sunday, city police chief Tariq Jamil said.

His son Maulana Mohammad Abdullah died in the attack, the officer said.

Madani, a former head of the Karachi chapter of a banned radical Sunni Muslim group, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), suffered bullets wounds to his shoulder. His condition was not serious, police said.

"It was a sectarian attack," former SSP official Shafiqur Rehman, said, blaming militants from the minority Shia community.

Gunmen shot dead a Shia activist and injured his wife in the southwestern city of Quetta on Monday, police said.



Policemen talk to a forensic expert on the steps of an Islamic bookshop that was raided as part of a fast moving investigation into the London bombings on Bude Road in Leeds yesterday. Britain should not blame foreign countries including Pakistan for the July 7 attacks but should look into its own failure to integrate Muslims, Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations Munir Akram said Sunday.

US struggles to defend bases in Central Asia

AFP, Washington

The United States is losing its way in Central Asia where it has been pressing for democratic reforms while also wanting to maintain military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Officially, Washington says it sees no contradiction between the ideals. But experts say the US administration faces problems in this key region in the war on terror, right on the border of Afghanistan.

"The United States is losing ground," said Martha Brill Olcott, an expert on Central Asia at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov has been widely criticised for human rights violations in the country he rules. Brill said that Karimov now appears to be turning his foreign policy toward Russia and China, which are less demanding in human rights standards.

Washington has failed to secure a commitment from Karimov to carry out an inquiry into the bloody repression of demonstrations at the southern town of Andijan -- that left 113 dead according to the government and several hundred according to non-government groups.

The Uzbek government has reduced the number of US flights allowed to land at the Karshi Khanabad base in southern Uzbekistan and has threatened to close the US facility altogether.

The State Department is putting a brave face on the dilemma. "We don't see pushing for democracy and being able to have relations with them on security issues as incompatible," said a department official speaking on condition of anonymity.

The United States has had another base at the airport in the Kyrgyzstan capital, Bishkek, since 2001. There the country's new democratically elected president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, is considering

closing the base.

At a meeting earlier this month of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation -- China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan -- Bakiyev signed a declaration asking for a date for the pullout of US troops from his country.

Russia also has a base outside Bishkek and it has announced it would increase troop numbers there from around 300 to more than 600.

General Richard Myers, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Thursday highlighted the importance of Central Asia to the United States and criticised Russia and China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation statement.

"It looks to me like two very large countries were trying to bully some smaller countries. That's how I view it," Myers said.

US officials in Washington and Bishkek say they are confident the US base there will remain open, no matter what Russia does.

UNSC EXPANSION

G4, AU vow to bridge differences

PTI, New York

The first substantive meeting between foreign ministers of India, Japan, Germany and Brazil, comprising the G4, and the African Union (AU) ended on a positive note with both sides vowing to overcome remaining differences over the UN Security Council expansion.

The two sides wrapped up talks on Sunday expressing firm determination to present in the UN General Assembly a joint draft resolution on the expansion of the Security Council.

The foreign ministers of both sides will meet again in Geneva on July 25 to review in-depth discussions that their UN ambassadors in New York will begin soon to thrash out remaining differences.

Summing up the mood of the participants, External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh, who hosted the extended luncheon meeting, said, "They want differences between them not only to narrow

down but to disappear."

They had "extremely useful, constructive and frank exchange of views in an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding", he said.

The meeting, which was scheduled to last three hours, dragged on for more than four hours as the ministers said they would like to sort out the issue at the earliest.

A joint statement issued at the end of the meeting said the two sides discussed a way forward and prospects for a common action with regard reform of the UN Security Council.

They also held a frank discussion on differences in their respective proposals, it said.

The two sides agreed to establish a joint mechanism and vowed to work expeditiously to explore ways to overcome the differences and arrive at a common position, the statement said.

Indian Ambassador Nirupam Sen said the two sides discussed in depth the issue of veto on which there are differences.

Sharon gives army free hand

Troops mass near Gaza, Abbas vows to halt attacks on Israel

REUTERS, Gaza

Israel massed troops and tanks at the Gaza frontier and gave a free hand to security forces to stop Palestinian cross-border rocket salvos on Sunday, but suggested it would delay a major escalation of violence.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accused Israel of undermining his efforts to calm the violence but vowed in remarks to reporters to do "all we can" to prevent further rocketing.

The worst surge in bloodshed since a truce was agreed in February has threatened to hamper Israel's withdrawal from Jewish settlements in occupied Gaza, starting next month, and amplified doubts over prospects for peace-making.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said

he had instructed the army "to act without limitation to stop the strikes on Israeli communities" after rocket and mortar salvos.

But Sharon later hinted Israel would not be quick to launch a major incursion into Gaza, telling his cabinet he would "weigh our response" to further truce violations.

Israeli political sources said a new Israeli offensive into the occupied territory was unlikely before Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visits later this week to try to salvage the crumbling ceasefire.

Six more Israelis were injured in rocket and mortar barrages on Sunday.

In the southern Gaza Strip, Israel killed Saeed Seyam, a commander of Hamas, a group bent on Israel's destruction and behind much of the rocket fire, with a shot from a settlement. The army called it part of a

revived assassination policy.

Israel said its soldiers also killed a gunman near a settlement in central Gaza.

In northern Gaza, an Israeli aircraft fired missiles at a car carrying three Hamas militants leaving a site in Beit Lahiya used to fire rockets at Jewish settlements, witnesses said. The militants jumped out but one was wounded by shrapnel.

Abbas reiterated a pledge to help curb the violence, telling reporters in Gaza: "We will do all we can to prevent these rockets ... we are determined to prevent these rockets, regardless of the price."

But he lashed out at Israel for its assaults and for threatening a new military offensive, and said he had sought American intervention to prevent it.

Afghan warlord found guilty of torture

BBC ONLINE

An Afghan warlord has been found guilty of a "heinous" campaign of torture and hostage taking in his homeland after a landmark case at the Old Bailey.

Faryadi Zardad, 42, of Streatham, south London, was convicted in a retrial of pursuing a reign of fear at Afghan checkpoints between 1991 and 1996.

It is thought to be the first case of its kind where witnesses gave evidence via video link from another country.

The Afghan fighter, who denied all charges, will be sentenced on Tuesday.

Zardad, who was in charge of the road between the Afghan capital Kabul and the city of Jalalabad, was first tracked down at his south London home by John Simpson for BBC Newsnight.

The programme was referred to Anti-Terrorist Branch officers to investigate after it was seen by MPs.



Former South African president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela greets the crowd yesterday on his arrival to his private house in the eastern cape town of Nqunu, where he is celebrating his 87th birthday.

Greetings pour in as Mandela turns 87

AFP, Qunu

Tributes poured in for South Africa's former president Nelson Mandela who turned 87 yesterday, but his birthday celebrations were clouded by an ugly legal spat over the sale of fake artwork bearing his name.

The elderly statesman was spending a quiet day with family in Qunu, his rural village in southeastern South Africa, while in Cape Town his birthday kicked off early Monday on Robben Island with a torch relay and a spectacular fireworks display.

Birthday wishes from all over South Africa were streaming in with the Johannesburg-based newspaper The Star running a front-page article under the banner: "Happy Birthday, Madiba" as he is affectionately called by his Xhosa clan name.

"Madiba continues to be a source of inspiration and leadership to the ANC, as he continues to provide guidance and hope to millions across South Africa, across the continent and across the world," the ruling African National Congress said.

Jakarta, rebels strike Aceh peace accord

'MPs must back' deal

BBC ONLINE

Indonesia's vice president has said accommodating a key Aceh rebel demand finalising a peace agreement will require a constitutional amendment.

At the end of a meeting in Finland on Sunday, the two sides agreed a draft deal to end the 29-year insurgency.

The government and rebels from the Free Aceh Movement (Gam) had agreed to sign the truce at a ceremony on 15 August.

But questions remain over the issue of political representation, which has proved a sticking point throughout.

During talks earlier in the week Gam abandoned its demand for Aceh independence in return for a certain amount of autonomy and greater access to the region's rich natural resources, and both sides agreed to establish an Aceh

monitoring mission, overseen by experts from European Union and other Asian countries.

But the main difficulty has been the rebels' request for participation in local Acehese politics.

It appears the government may have acquiesced to this demand, but is still unclear whether the accord will allow Gam to form its own Aceh-based party - and if so, when.

"A local party would need a change in the law, that would need the agreement of the parliament," Kalla told reporters in Jakarta on Sunday.

"The government will try as hard as it can to create the political and legal situation in support of that."

Under current legislation, every political party in Indonesia must have representation in at least half of the country's 33 provinces, and have its headquarters in Jakarta.



Ex-British PM Heath no more

AFP, London

Tributes poured in yesterday for former British leader Sir Edward Heath who has died aged 89, with fellow political veteran Margaret Thatcher describing him as a "political giant" and Prime Minister Tony Blair calling him a "man of great integrity".

Heath, most famously remembered for leading Britain into Europe, passed away on Sunday after growing weak in recent days, a spokesman said.

Despite only serving one term in office from 1970 until 1974, He famously took Britain into what was then the European Economic Community, the forerunner to the European Union.

Iraq plans anti-terror pact with neighbours

Donors start meeting, Baghdad pleads for greater int'l role in rebuilding

AFP, Istanbul/Shuhne

Iraq plans to discuss a regional anti-terrorism agreement at a meeting here today of interior ministers of its neighbouring countries, Iraqi Interior Minister Bayan Solagh said.

"We have prepared an agreement. The aim is to prevent terrorism and put borders under control," Solagh told a limited group of reporters Sunday, the Anatolia news agency reported.

"If neighbouring states reach agreement and help each other, we can wipe out terrorism," he said.

A top priority for the Baghdad government is to ensure strict border controls with its neighbours in hopes of preventing the infiltration

of insurgents into the war-torn country in the grip of near-daily bloodletting.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari was in Tehran on an historic visit Sunday to sign a number of deals, including an agreement to share intelligence to prevent terrorist infiltration.

The Istanbul meeting, the second of its kind, will bring together ministers from Turkey, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Syria, Iran and Jordan.

Turkey, which is north of Iraq, is likely to welcome a cooperation agreement with Baghdad to prevent armed Kurdish rebels crossing into Turkey from their northern Iraqi hideouts to engage in anti-

government violence.

Meanwhile, Iraq yesterday called on international donors to take a greater role in the reconstruction of the violence-ravaged country and deliver basic needs to its people.

"We cannot act as if it is business as usual. It is time we made a difference to the people of Iraq," Iraqi Planning Minister Barham Saleh said at the opening of a two-day international donors' meeting on the Jordanian shores of the Dead Sea.

Saleh, who also admitted that corruption was a "great threat" to reconstruction, stressed the need for coordinated and cohesive action over the next six months to ensure results and bolster Iraqi ownership of projects.

Tigers demand direct tsunami relief

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tiger rebels Sunday urged foreign donors to fund their tsunami relief efforts directly as peace broker Norway ruled out immediately reviving aid talks after a court ruling scuttled a crucial aid-sharing deal.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they were no longer interested in sharing the three billions dollars of assistance pledged by foreign donors with the Sri Lankan government after Friday's ruling.

On Friday Sri Lanka's Supreme Court, citing constitutional issues, blocked the deal to share foreign aid between Colombo and Tiger rebels who have waged a separatist war that has left more than 60,000 dead since 1972.

The deal, reached with the help of Norway almost six months after tsunamis devastated the island nation, killing nearly 31,000 and leaving one million homeless, is now in limbo.

The LTTE's political wing chief S.P. Thebaiselvan was quoted by their website as saying they were "not concerned any more" about the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) set up to bring relief to hundreds of thousands still suffering the effects of the tsunamis.

"He said that they will be putting greater effort into informing the international community about the ground reality and request them to make the decision to deliver aid directly to them," the website said.

Sri Lanka's international donors had insisted on the joint aid mechanism, as many can not give money directly to the LTTE because of the group's designation as a foreign terrorist organisation by many states.

The collapse of the tsunami aid deal has increased tensions in the country's volatile northeast, and is seen as a major setback to the peace process and fragile truce in place since February 2002.