

Nepal bars visas to 4 African nations

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal has told its diplomatic missions abroad not to issue visas to citizens from four African countries because of unspecified security reasons, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

"The immigration department has sent letters to all the embassies and foreign missions abroad not to issue visas for ordinary passport holders from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Ghana," Yadav Khanal, the Nepal foreign ministry spokesman, told AFP on Wednesday.

He said the decision was taken by officials at the home ministry because of "security reasons." He did not elaborate.

Home Ministry spokesman Baman Prasad Neupane said that the new regulation took effect on January 1, 2007.

Police officials, who declined to be named, said the government took the step because several nationals from the four countries had been arrested recently in connection with drug and currency smuggling operations in Nepal.

Iran's top N-negotiator goes to China today

AFP, Tehran

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani will arrive in China today for a two-day visit carrying a message from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the state news agency IRNA reported.

Larijani will deliver the message in person to Chinese President Hu Jintao and also meet other top officials, including Luo Gan of the standing committee of the Communist Party's political bureau.

No further details were disclosed. China supports Iran's right to a nuclear programme but as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council voted for a resolution that imposed sanctions targeting Iran's nuclear industry and ballistic missile programme.

Both Russia and China – which have strong economic interests in Iran – worked to water down drafts of the Security Council resolution and Beijing has since called for more talks on the nuclear issue.



PHOTO: STAR

Dhakabashi takes out a colourful procession from Shishu Academy in the city on Tuesday celebrating Eid-ul-Azha.

Poll must be held within 90-day

FROM PAGE 1 decision in this regard.

"He [Ershad] could take part in the election only if the law allows," he said on the demand to allow Ershad to participate in the election.

"They [14-party] have announced to boycott the election due to the cancellation of Ershad's nomination and a few parties who earlier told against corruption are now threatening to build up movement only to save a corrupt person," he said.

Rapid Action Battalunion (Rab) and police did not harass anyone politically and the law and order situation will deteriorate if Rab and police are made inactive, Mannan Bhuiyan said.

BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan and BNP chairperson's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury were also present during the briefing.

JAMAAT'S REACTION

The caretaker government should enforce its maximum capacity of the state-mechanism if anyone tries to resist the January 22 election, leaders of Jamaat-e Islami said hours after Awami League-led

grand alliance's declaration not to contest the upcoming election.

At a press briefing at its Maghbazar office yesterday, the Jamaat leaders also expressed their optimism that the diplomats and foreign missions would support the to-be-held election even if Awami League and its allies do not take part.

When asked if they would contest in the election separately in absence of the AL-led grand alliance, Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid did not make any comment.

He, however, said his party has filed nominations in around 150 constituencies across the country.

Asked if the foreign missions would acknowledge the election in the present condition, Mujahid said, "As the country is ours, it does not matter whether they [foreign missions] accept the election or not."

"If they believe in our democracy and acknowledge our sovereignty, they should support the election even if some party do not contest," he added.

About the election boycott by AL and its allies, the Jamaat leader

said, "The grand alliance have all the right not to participate in the election, but they do not have any right to resist our participation."

It does not matter if the Awami League participates or not as around 11 more parties would contest in the election, he said, adding, "The caretaker government should apply all its power if anyone tries to resist the election."

Asked if the next election will borrow the same fate as that of the February 15, 1996 election, Mujahid said they firmly believe that the coming election will be a free and fair one and it will not be a repetition of the February, 1996 election.

"They [AL-led alliance] may have daydreams expecting that the election will be cancelled, but it will not happen," the Jamaat leader said.

Party's Nayeb-e Amir Mokbul Ahmed, assistant secretary generals Abdul Kader and ATM Mazharul Islam and Publicity Secretary Tasnim Alam were also present in the briefing.

France backs Italian drive for global death penalty ban

AFP, Paris

France said yesterday that it would back Italy's efforts, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, to push for a world-wide ban on the death penalty.

"France's position is to work for the universal abolition of the death penalty, in close collaboration with its European partners, and in all relevant international bodies," a foreign ministry spokesman said, when asked about the Italian drive.

Italy was among the many European nations to have opposed the execution of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein last week.

The Italian government said on Monday that it wanted to reintroduce a proposal for a universal moratorium on the death penalty before the United Nations General Assembly.

But the head of Italy's libertarian Radical Party, Marco Pannella, 76, is entering the second week of a hunger strike launched to urge Rome to propose a resolution against capital punishment before the UN Security Council.

The UN Security Council is made up of five permanent members – the United States, Britain, China, Russia and France – plus 10 non-permanent members, all of which serve two-year terms and five of which are elected every year.

Of the five permanent members, China and the United States use the death penalty widely. The other three have abolished it.

Amnesty International says at least 2,148 people were executed and 5,186 were sentenced to death in 2005, mainly in China, Saudi Arabia, the United States and Iran.

Moderate quake hits Sumatra

AFP, Jakarta

A moderate 5.3-magnitude earthquake struck off the Indonesian island of Sumatra yesterday, seismologists said, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

The earthquake hit at 7:47pm (1247 GMT). It was centred 105 kilometres (65 miles) west of Banda Aceh, about 50km under the seabed, the US Geological Survey reported.

The Indonesian archipelago sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, where continental plates meet, causing frequent seismic and volcanic activity.

Indonesia was the nation worst hit by the earthquake-triggered Asian tsunami in December 2004, which killed some 168,000 people in Aceh province.

Pak PM to visit Afghanistan amid border mining row

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz will visit Afghanistan today for talks with President Hamid Karzai amid a row over Pakistan's decision to fence and mine their joint border, the foreign ministry said.

Aziz, who is visiting Afghanistan on Karzai's invitation, would "review all aspects of bilateral relations", the ministry's spokeswoman, Tasnim Aslam, told a briefing yesterday.

"We attach great importance to our relationship and interaction with Afghanistan. These contacts are helpful in addressing challenges that our two countries face," Aslam said.

The visit comes amid tensions between the two key allies in the US-led "war against terrorism", following accusations from Afghanistan that Pakistan was not doing enough to crackdown on Taliban militants crossing from its side of the border.

Pakistan last month announced

that it had tasked its army to work out the logistical details for fencing and mining parts of the rugged 2,500-kilometre (1,500-mile) frontier.

The decision is likely to figure in Aziz's meeting with Karzai, who has said he would use "every method" to stop mines being planted on the border.

Pakistan is among some 40 countries who are not signatories to a 1997 treaty against the use of mines.

As Taliban-linked unrest soared in Afghanistan in 2006, Karzai last month publicly accused Islamabad for the first time of backing the Islamists, adding that Pakistan wanted to turn Afghans into "slaves".

Islamabad has denied the allegations, which have soured relations between the neighbours. Pakistan said it had deployed 80,000 troops along the border to hunt down Taliban and Al-Qaeda

militants.

Some 4,000 people – including 1,000 civilians, but mostly rebels – died last year in insurgency-related unrest, making 2006 Afghanistan's bloodiest year since the fall of the Taliban five years ago.

Israel urges UN chief to revoke Iran membership

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs Avigdor Lieberman yesterday called on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to revoke Iran's membership over its nuclear programme and calls for the Jewish state's destruction.

"I call on you to act now, before it is too late. Revoke Iran's membership in the United Nations," Lieberman said in a letter to the new UN chief obtained by AFP.



PHOTO: STAR

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia offers munajat at the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (R) in Sylhet on Sunday before launching election campaign.