

Curfew in Nepal towns amid ethnic unrest

AFP, Kathmandu

Daytime curfews were imposed on four towns in southeastern Nepal yesterday after several deaths and dozens of injuries during violent protests in the impoverished region, local officials said.

"The situation remains serious today as dozens of protesters have already attempted to defy the curfew," said local administrator Madhav Prasad Regmi from Janakpur, 375 kilometres south-east of Kathmandu.

The violent protests began last week after a 16-year-old boy was shot dead during a scuffle between Maoists and Mahadhesi activists demanding increased political representation in the Himalayan nation.

Nepali Mahadhesi community leaders have said that the ethnic group accounts for around a third of Nepal's 27 million people.

They dominate the Terai region, situated in the southern plains bordering India, and have long complained of discrimination by highland communities.

Officials in the area said at least 35 protesters were injured Thursday in Janakpur, and at least 20 more hurt in Birgunj, another of the four towns under curfew along with Biratnagar and Lahan.

Protests earlier this week left at least five protesters dead.

The leader of the group organising the protests warned that unless Nepal's government addressed their complaints, the unrest would continue.

The country has only recently seen an end to ten years of civil war with Maoist insurgents, after the rebels and coalition government signed a peace deal bringing the Maoists into parliament and government.

"If they try to ignore the issue, the protests will have dire consequences," Upendra Yadav, the chairman of the recently formed Mahadhesi Janadhikar Forum, told AFP.

Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has called on the group to come for dialogue, and the Mahadhesi leader urged Koirala to name a date for talks.

"This movement is taking place because the people of the Terai region have always been discriminated against by the state. Even the new interim government is not addressing our problems so we are fighting for equality," Yadav told AFP.

He also complained about the new composition of the 330-seat parliament, where the Maoists now have 83 seats.

"There are only 73 Mahadhesi from various political parties in the current parliament. This percentage is very low, we want more representation," said Yadav.

The English language Nepali Times also warned in a front-page editorial that Nepal would be "falling from the frying pan into the fire" if it failed to tackle the issue.

"The root of the crisis is deep, long standing bitterness among the Mahadhesi population. Discriminated against by governments in the past, they saw that they would be denied political representation in proportion to their numbers by the interim constitution too," the paper said.

Nepal's Maoists, however, have said that pro-Royalists and militant Hindus are involved in the protests and merely trying to undermine a peace process which has left King Gyanendra and the monarchy as a whole facing the boot.

But Yadav said his group was also opposed to the monarchy.

"Where there is unrest, there can be room for someone to use the situation to their benefit. The palace may try to take advantage of this situation, but we won't let it happen because we are also against monarchy. We are not monarchists, we also want a republic," he said.

HR Watch

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rights group Odhikar reported that during January 12 to 21, the law enforcement agencies killed 19 people, either in custody or in what the agencies attributed to "crossfire" during arrest. Two people died reportedly while trying to escape arrest.

Based on press accounts and its own investigations, Odhikar attributed eight deaths to Rab, five to the police, and four to the army. Another Bangladeshi human rights group, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), reported that five people had died in army custody alone since the state of emergency was proclaimed.

The Human Rights Watch said killings in custody have been a persistent problem in Bangladesh. During the last large-scale military deployment in 2002, at least 50 people died in custody in unclear circumstances.

Human Rights Watch called for an independent inquiry into allegations of these and previous extrajudicial killings, and for the government to make the findings public.

"The government's first step must be to issue a direct order not to kill suspects in custody," said Adams, adding, "The government should then aggressively investigate and hold all those who violated the law accountable, or its reputation inside Bangladesh and abroad will suffer."

It pointed out that as of January 1, Bangladesh was contributing 9,681 military and police to UN peacekeeping operations, second only to Pakistan.

"Extra-judicial killings put the country's reputation as a respect-

able contributor to UN peacekeeping forces at risk," Adams said.

Since the current caretaker government assumed power on January 12, the law enforcement agencies have conducted what they call an anti-crime and anti-corruption campaign.

Human Rights Watch called for the release of Aminul Islam and Abul Kashem Palash. On January 12, members of Rab arrested the two leaders of the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (Adab), an organisation of some 1,150 non-governmental organisations across the country. They were reportedly held incommunicado in detention until January 23, when family members were allowed to visit.

On January 16, the High Court directed the Bangladesh government to show cause within 10 days why the detentions should not be considered illegal. The court will review the case on February 5.

"Arrests must be carried out in accordance with the law and due process, not by rounding up huge numbers of people who may or may not have broken the law," said Adams. "Putting NGO leaders in prison and holding them incommunicado without any apparent grounds is indefensible," he added.

Castro "almost trotting" but still unseen

AFP, Havana

Six months after undergoing surgery, President Fidel Castro might well be "almost trotting," as his Venezuelan friend and ally Hugo Chavez put it, but with little news of his condition, some Cubans remain skeptical.

"There are reasons to be incredulous," a 51-year-old retired screenwriter said on Thursday, pointing to the revolutionary leader's frail appearance when he was last seen on television three months ago.

"I don't believe in such a recovery," he said, declining to give his name and adding "it's best not to think of this."

But several other people interviewed in the streets of Havana said they firmly believed the 80-year-old president's condition was improving steadily.

On Thursday, Cuba's parliamentary president Ricardo Alarcon said Castro's recovery "is going very well," and his eventual return to power, would depend on his further "post-operation progress."

Castro underwent intestinal surgery on July 27 and "provisionally" handed over power to his brother Raul, who is Cuba's defense minister and longtime number two.

He last appeared at a public event one day before his operation.

"We'd like to see him," said Elia Echeverria, a 28-year-old security guard, leaning against the decaying facade of a once grand Havana mansion. "But we will only see him when they decide so," he said. "They," he explained, are the top communist officials in this one-party state.

"If they say he is recovering, then he is recovering," he said, with what sounded like a hint of irony.

Venezuela's President Chavez announced in Caracas on Wednesday that Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage had told him Castro is "walking more than me; he's almost trotting."

Several people in the Cuban capital insisted Castro clearly lived up to his nickname "El Caballo" — Spanish for "The Horse."

Fertiliser

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districts on Wednesday and Thursday.

They also arrested five people—four in Tangail and one in Gaibandha—for illegal hoarding of fertiliser.

Our Tangail correspondent reported that the joint forces raided two BCIC dealer shops at Sagardigha Bazar in Ghatail upazila on Wednesday night, seized 1886 sacks of fertiliser and arrested four people.

The arrestees are BCIC dealer Abdul Jalil and his employees Aynal Haque, Abul Hossain, and Arifur Rahman.

Acting on a tip off, a joint team of army and police seized the fertiliser when dealer Abdul Jalil at Sagardigha Bazar was loading those on trucks, sources and witnesses said.

In Gaibandha, the joint forces in a drive on Thursday arrested fertiliser dealer Tota Mia at Harinabari village under Palashbari upazila for hoarding fertiliser. They seized 22 sacks of urea fertiliser for his possession, according to our correspondent.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent adds: The joint forces, led by a magistrate, seized 665 sacks of urea and 731 sacks of other types of fertilisers from the godown of Biplab Traders at Jagat Bazar in the district town on Thursday night.

On information, a team of the joint forces raided the godown at around 11:00pm and seized the fertiliser stocked illegally.

Biplab, the owner of the godown, is absconding. Police filed a case against Biplab for illegal hoarding of fertiliser.

EC failed to hold polls within stipulated time

Dr Kamal says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday said the present caretaker government will be considered a legal government until handing over power to an elected government.

In an interview with a private television channel, he urged the caretaker government to have talks with people from all walks of life with a view to holding a meaningful election and bringing qualitative change in politics.

The deviation from the constitution through President Iajuddin Ahmed's swearing in as the caretaker government chief has now been corrected with Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed's taking charge of the post, he observed.

On expiry of the 90-day time stipulated by the constitution for holding parliamentary election, Kamal said it is the failure of the Election Commission that it could not hold the election within the time.

"The new caretaker government has no relation with this failure," he said. The tenure of the new caretaker government is not limited to 90 days, he said, adding that this caretaker government will expire after a new parliament is formed and a new government takes charge.

Praising the initiatives taken by Dr Fakhruddin's government regarding the election, Kamal said the caretaker government needs take opinions and help of the people.

At the present situation the people will come forward with their opinions to help and cooperate with the caretaker government for the sake of the country's welfare, he said.

Eviction victims

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all my things on the street. We spent last night on the cot under the open sky. Now how can I go for work to earn bread and how will I repay the NGO loan?" said Ratan Mia, a fisherman.

Tasnura, a nine-year-old girl, who along with 40 kids studies at a school run by Assistance for Slum Development, said the police demolished their schoolhouse too.

"I came to know from newspapers that many lawmakers grabbed lands in Gazipur and built industry there. But the government cannot provide us 10 feet land for our shelter," said Monti Mia, a grocery shop owner.

People from the slum near the railway tracks in Karwan Bazar and Mohakhali areas are staying in makeshift houses a little away so that they can come back when the situation becomes 'normal' again.

However, the dwellers of Bashpati slum in Mohammadpur that was gutted on Monday night, told this correspondent that Rab members gave them some old clothes and a few kilograms of rice for each family.

There the slum dwellers have started making bamboo structures for their shanties.

Illegal party

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Azad and Julhas of the same party, Abdul Khaleq, Delwar Hossain Dilu and Abu Hanif of AL's front organisations and Gazi Abbas, Nada Faruq and Lablu of BNP's front organisations, said sources.

Visiting Karwan Bazar wholesale market yesterday, where Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has been carrying out an eviction drive for a few days now, more than 20 illegally constructed clubs were found.

The clubs in Karwan Bazar control the area around them and collect tolls from traders who sit nearby.

However since the eviction drive had begun a number of election camps and social clubs in different parts of the city were torn down by the patrons themselves or by the law enforcement agencies.

In the Chankharpuil area, the president of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) unit of BNP constructed a temporary election camp and a hotel on the DMCH premises without any permission from the authorities. He also illegally took over more than 100 shops built by DCC and has been renting them out to unauthorised businesses.

Local sources said he shares the rentals collected from those shops with fellow party leaders, activists and his political godfather.

Director General of Rab SM Mizanur Rahman admitted that such clubs are involved in different criminal activities and said, "Such clubs will be shut down soon."

However, he said it is not possible to evict all illegal structures in one go.

Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) ABM Bazlur Rahman said within a day or two he will ask the officers-in-charge (OCs) of all the police stations under DMP to prepare a list of such illegally built clubs and then launch an all out drive to evict them.

Iran ready to launch satellite, raising arms alarm

AFP, Washington

Iran is poised to launch a satellite into space, a step that could herald a new dimension in Tehran's strategic capabilities, Aviation Week and Space Technology said Thursday on its website.

A recently assembled, 30-ton ballistic missile-turned space launcher could also be used for testing longer-range missile strike technologies, according to the report which the weekly magazine said would appear in its January 29 issue.

The US Defense Department did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment on the report.

The Iranian space launcher "will lift off soon" with an Iranian satellite, said Alacodin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, according to the weekly.

Boroujerdi made his announcement during a speech to religious students and clerics in Qom, where Iran has conducted some of its ballistic missile tests, said the magazine without indicating when he spoke.

Iran's new launch capabilities come at a time of heightened Western concern over Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs, and follows only by weeks a reported missile test by China that destroyed a satellite in space.

Iran's new launcher also highlights close technological ties between Iran and North Korea missile programs, the magazine said, citing US intelligence agencies.

Iran's space launcher raises concerns in the West that it could eventually lead to an Iranian intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a range of nearly 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles), putting center Europe, Russia, China and India within its range, Aviation said.

US intelligence agencies, said the weekly, believe the Iranian launcher is a derivation of Iran's Shahab 3 missile, which has a range of 1,300-1,600 kilometers (800-1,000 miles).

Analysts with Global Security.org think tank, said Aviation Week, believe the new modified missile

could be a stepping stone to an Iranian clone of the North Korea Taepodong 2C/3 ballistic missile that failed in a launch attempt last July in North Korea.

The US Defense Intelligence Agency has said Iran could have the capability of developing a 4,800-kilometers (3,000-mile) range ICBM by 2015, the weekly said.

"But ultimately, their space program aims to orbit reconnaissance satellites like Israel's 'Ofek,' using an Iranian satellite launcher from Iranian territory," Uzi Rubin, former head of the Israel Missile Defense Organization, said in a report for The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, according to the weekly.

The planned satellite launch, besides demonstrating Iran's technical prowess, "would be a potent political and emotional weapon in the Middle East," the Aviation Week article said.

"Orbiting its own satellite would send a powerful message throughout the Muslim world about the Shiite regime in Tehran," it said.

Iran's reported space launch capability also coincides with the United States' planned deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic of a missile defense system designed to intercept missile attacks from Iran and North Korea.

The United States already has a network of monitoring satellites and detection radars, as well as missile interceptors in Alaska and California. It wants to deploy a radar and 10 additional interceptors in Europe by 2011.

Iran is under fierce international criticism for its uranium enrichment program, which critics suspect masks a nuclear weapons program. Tehran insists it is aimed at generating electricity.

The United Nations Security Council approved in December a resolution imposing sanctions on Tehran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, after the Islamic Republic refused a UN demand that it suspend uranium enrichment.

Joint forces arrest

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parishad (UP) chairman for his reported involvement in criminal activities, and recovered a worn out revolver from his possession. They also seized two firearms in Chittagong during a drive.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) detained 1,751 persons, 10 of whom were detained under the Arms Act, 36 were convicted fugitives, 869 had arrest warrants against them, and 836 were picked up on other charges.

During the 24-hour drive preceding 6:00pm yesterday, police and Rab seized 14 firearms, nine other arms and 376 bullets, said a news release from the police headquarter.

The army held 48 people, but could not recover any firearm or ammunition during the period, said a home ministry official.

SYLHET

Our staff correspondent reported from Sylhet that Jubo League leader and ward commissioner Azadur Rahman Azad was handed over to Sylhet Kotwali police after his arrest by the joint forces.

Police produced him to Sylhet Sadar Magistrate Court, which sent him to detention in the afternoon.

Azad was arrested in connection with a case filed under the Special Power Act, police said.

CHITTAGONG

Our Chittagong staff correspondent reported that the army arrested four persons including Mohammad Nazimuddin, 45, chairman of Fatehpur UP under Fatikhchhari upazila for their reported involvement in criminal activities, and recovered three firearms and a dagger in the 24 hours preceding 6:00pm yesterday.

The army also arrested five persons from Khagrachhari, two from Cox's Bazar and one from Rangamati during the drive.

Other arrestees in Chittagong are Rashed of North Guzara under Raozan upazila, Abu Syed Chowdhury of Lohardighir Par under Lohagara upazila, and Alamgir alias Liton of Madhyam Puranagar under Salkania upazila.

The forces recovered two pipe guns and a dagger from Rashed.

RANGPUR

The joint forces arrested 70 alleged criminals from different places in the district.

Twenty three of them were arrested from different parts of Sadar upazila, five from Gangachara upazila, four from Taraganj upazila, seven each from Badarganj and Pirganj upazilas, two each from Pirgachha

Yunus

FROM PAGE 16
Eminent world leaders, Nobel laureates, representatives from the major political parties from all regions of the world, and leading civil society organisations working for peace and human rights are likely to attend the conference.

The eminent personalities who will attend the conference include Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Lech Walesa, Hernando De Soto and Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.

The conference will discuss the subjects of conflict resolution and peace building, Gandhian philosophy for poverty eradication, education and people's empowerment, dialogue among peoples and cultures, and a nuclear weapons-free and non-violent world order.

The conference will conclude with a Satyagraha centenary declaration.

Besides attending the conference, Prof Yunus will deliver a speech in the auditorium of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) on January 30.

and Kounia upazilas, and 20 from Mithapukur upazila.

Police said the arrestees were charged with different kinds of criminal activities and were sent to Rangpur jail.

NETRAKONA

Our Netrakona correspondent reported that the joint forces arrested 22 persons from different upazilas of the district between Thursday night and yesterday evening.

SATKHIRA

Our Satkhira correspondent reported that Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) arrested a local leader of Jatityatabadi Jubo Dal yesterday from Keragachhi, a border village under Kalaroa upazila.

The arrestee is Sajjad Hossain alias Azad, general secretary of Keragachhi union Jubo Dal. BDR picked him up from his house in Keragachhi.

Police said he is accused in several criminal cases for smuggling and illegal toll collection.

Besides, the joint forces last night arrested six other alleged criminals from different areas of Tala upazila.

Police said the detainees were accused in several criminal cases filed with Tala police station.

FARIDPUR

The joint forces arrested a listed criminal from the district on Thursday, reported BSS.

Police sources said the arrestee Atal Chakrabarty has been wanted for a long time for his involvement in several criminal offences including mugging, and extortion.

He had also been jailed earlier for seven years for possessing arms, and for two and a half years for another crime. Another criminal case against him has been pending with police.

GAZIPUR

Our Gazipur correspondent reported that members of Rab-11 arrested a listed criminal Nazmul Ahsan Belu and his close associate Jahangir Alam Swapan from Kapashia area in the district yesterday. Besides, army personnel arrested Delwar Hossain from the same area.

Suicide bomber, guard killed in hotel blast in Islamabad

AFP, Islamabad

A suicide bomber and a security guard were killed and four people were wounded in a blast at the Marriott Hotel in the Pakistani capital yesterday, the interior minister and officials told AFP.

"It was a suicide attack. The suicide attacker and a guard were killed," Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao said by telephone.

"The attacker tried to enter the hotel and was stopped by the security guard and there was a scuffle and the blast occurred," he said.

"The attacker's body was totally mutilated. There is hardly any body left. His limbs were scattered around the area."

A senior security official also confirmed it was a suicide bombing. "It is a suicide attack, the man approached the entrance and he was apparently stopped by the guard when the explosion occurred. The guard was also killed," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Four injured people were treated at the city's Poly Clinic hospital, a doctor said.

"We have received four casualties," doctor Murtaza Nadeem said. "One is serious and three others have minor injuries," he added.

BDR, BSF

FROM PAGE 1

Lt Col Mohammad Asif Abdur Rouf, commanding officer (CO) of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the incident.

He said BDR personnel have been put on alert on the border following the incident.

Sabina

FROM PAGE 1

Khairul's alleged involvement with Hawa and the land dispute might have instigated revenge in Hawa's family members, she told The Daily Star, adding that they used to often threaten Khairul's family with "such revenge that he will suffer throughout his life".

All the three—Milon, Golap and Manju, however, attended the marriage ceremony so that nobody suspects their involvement in the incident, Nadia added.

When asked if she knew about her husband's illicit affair, Sabina said they did not know anything. She said she is the second among five sisters and her poor father hurriedly arranged her marriage.

A case was filed with Karimganj Police Station naming Milon, his wife Hawa Begum and brothers Golap and Manju. All four have been absconding since the incident.

Earlier, investigations have gathered that the bank's biggest shareholder Obaidul Karim and its 23 officials including former managing director Chowdhury Koyes Sami were involved in swindling the massive amount out of it.

According to the FIR (first information report), Tk 488.50 crore was misappropriated through unauthorised issuance of 369 inter-branch debit advices with the assistance of several officials at the Oriental Bank head office, and Bangshal, Nawabpur, Mirpur Road, Karwan Bazar, and principal branches between 2003 and June 2006.

Of the accused, still working at the problem-ridden private bank are Senior Assistant Vice-president Mohammad Yameen, assistant vice-presidents Mohammad Fazlur Rahman and Abul Hossain Chokder, Executive Officer Mohammad Emdad Hossain Bhuiyan, and senior officers Touhiduddin Khandaker and Mohammad Firoz Kabir.

The former officials are senior vice-president SM Harun, senior assistant vice-presidents AQM Mahmud Ullah, Manjurul Alam and ANM Asifur Rahman—now absconding, executive officers Tariqul Alam and Arifur Rahman—now working at One Bank, assistant vice-presidents Alamgir Kabir, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Syed Mahmud Hasan, Mustaq Ahmed—now manager of One Bank, Syed Sarfaraj Shah—now working at State Bank of India in Dhaka, Khandaker Shahruk Ahmed—now working at IFIC Bank, executive vice-presidents Quamrul Islam, Istiaq Ahmed Chowdhury—now deputy managing director of Trust Bank Ltd, vice-president AZM Saleh—presently manager of One Bank, and assistant executive officer Saiful Aziz Pavel.

A lecture on "Economic Policies and Strategies of Shah AMS Kibria" will be held at Institute of Diploma Engineers Auditorium at 4:00pm tomorrow. Bangladesh Foundation for Development Research will organise the event.

On January 31, Agami Prakashani will organise a launching ceremony of the book "Prabandha Sangraha" composed with different published articles written by Kibria in 2004.

Shah AMS Kibria and four others were killed in a grenade attack carried out shortly after a rally at Boiadderbazar in Habiganj on January 27, 2005.

Kibria's

FROM PAGE 1

Banani graveyard in the capital from 8:30am, a press release said.

Family members will hold recitation of the Quran and a milad mehfil after Asr prayers at his Dhanmondi residence.

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