

# Maoists sworn into new Nepal govt

Rebels under pressure to end violence

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoists were under renewed pressure yesterday to put an end to their violent practices, the day after five former rebels were sworn into the Himalayan nation's new interim government.

Although Sunday's cabinet swearing-in ceremony was greeted as a much-needed boost for a fragile peace process, there were also reminders of the tough work ahead for the country to turn the page on a decade of civil war.

"Nepal's people and mainstream political parties will now be watching the Maoists behaviour very closely,"

said Lokraj Baral, a political science professor from Nepal's Tribhuvan University.

"The Maoists still need to improve their behaviour," he said, referring to ongoing complaints of kidnappings, beatings, intimidation and extortion by Maoist members.

After fighting for ten years to impose a communist republic on the Hindu-majority kingdom in a war that left at least 13,000 people dead, the rebels signed up for peace in November last year.

Their entry into government came after they registered their weapons and fighters under United Nations supervision. They also

vowed that fighting was over and have pledged to roll back their parallel government structures.

"The nation has issued a sigh of relief, but it remains to be seen how the new government will function," said Kapil Shrestha, another prominent political analyst and academic.

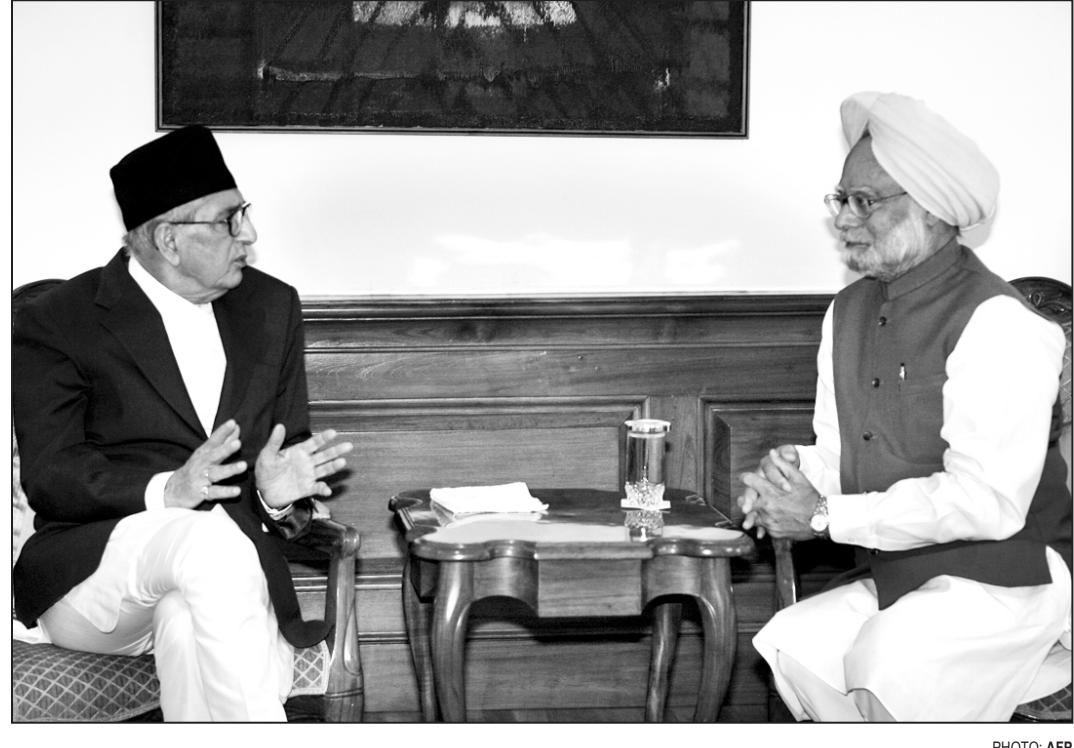
"With their entry into government, the Maoists now have no excuse for indulging in violence and intimidation," he said.

According to Ian Martin, the United Nations' chief representative to Nepal's peace process, "the challenges ahead cannot be overemphasised" as the cabinet attempts to steer the country to elections that will decide

on the future of the monarchy.

"Effective law enforcement that respects international standards, accountability for violations of citizens' rights, and ending breaches of the commitments under the comprehensive peace agreement will be critical elements for success in the coming months," Martin said in a statement.

The Maoists still feature on Washington's list of foreign "terrorist" organisations, and the US ambassador to Kathmandu warned mainstream political leaders last week that it was too early to allow them into government.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) listens to Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala during a meeting at Singh's residence in New Delhi yesterday. Koirala is in India to take part in the forthcoming 14th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit.

## Baghdad bombings kill 6 US soldiers

21 Shias kidnapped & slain, 20 others killed in bombing and attacks

AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents killed six US soldiers in twin bombings over the weekend, the military said, undermining assessments by visiting congressmen that the Baghdad security crackdown is making progress.

Gunmen kidnapped and killed 21 Shia workers on their way home from Baghdad to the restive province of Diyala to its north while 20 other Iraqis were killed in bombing and attacks, officials and a medic said Monday.

The workers, employed in Baghdad's popular Shorja market, were

abducted on Sunday as they headed home after work by gunmen who ambushed their minibus and took them away to an unknown destination.

Two coordinated roadside bomb attacks in the capital killed six American soldiers overnight Saturday to Sunday, four of them in the second blast targeting a response team scrambled to the site of the first deadly explosion.

In the northern oil city of Kirkuk, a bomber blew up his truck full of flour and explosives near a primary school and police station in Kirkuk, killing a total 12 people, including the nine children, police and medics said.

AP, Tehran

Iranian state radio reported that all 15 British sailors and marines held captive by Iran have confessed to illegally entering Iranian waters but, in an apparent softening in the dispute, said their statements would not air because of "positive changes" from Britain.

The softer tone was apparently mirrored in London, where an official said Britain has agreed to consider discussing with Iran how to avoid future disputes over contested waters in the Persian Gulf.

Britain, however, wants an unconditional release of the crew and is not "negotiating" for their freedom, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the crisis. Iran has demanded an apology from Britain as a condition for the release of the crew, who were seized March 23.

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In video Sunday, the captives appeared on the state-run Arabic-language TV channel Al-Alam in separate clips, pointing at the same map of the Persian Gulf.

The first sailor, who was identified as Royal Marine Capt Chris Air, said the Iranians supplied the group with GPS coordinates, which he said were "apparently" in Iranian waters.

## Iran cites 'positive changes' from UK

All British sailors confess to illegal entry

AP, Tehran



Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri (2-L), Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee (C), Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama (R) pose along with other representatives of Saarc countries during the 28th session of the Council of Ministers on the eve of the forthcoming 14th Saarc Summit in New Delhi yesterday.

## Amnesty urges Saarc to address HR violation

AFP, New Delhi

Amnesty International urged a South Asian bloc Monday to agree on a human rights charter and work to fight widespread abuses, as leaders from eight nations gathered for a summit.

"South Asian governments must tie down their commitment to protection of human rights in their countries through an Asian Charter of Human Rights," said Purna Sen, Asia-Pacific director of the London-based rights group.

Sen spoke ahead of Tuesday's start of a two-day summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) in New Delhi, where trade and cultural contacts are expected to dominate.

But Amnesty and other rights groups say many of South Asia's 1.4 billion population live in fear as basic rights come under increasing threat by corrupt police and a breakdown in the rule of law -- and that this should also be a topic of regional coordination.

Security forces and police in Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, the Maldives and Afghanistan have all been accused by rights groups of forced disappearances, torture and arbitrary arrests.

Amnesty International India.

"Human rights are key to such development and we call upon Saarc to promote and protect the human rights of the women, men and children of South Asia in all of its work."

Indo-Pak officials to hold talks on Siachen glacier this week

AFP, New Delhi

Top defence officials from nuclear-armed south Asian rivals Pakistan and India are to meet later this week for talks on possible troop cuts at the world's highest frontline, an official said yesterday.

An Indian defence ministry spokesman said the defence secretaries of the two countries would meet on Friday and Saturday, most likely in Islamabad, for fresh discussions on the 6,300-metre (20,800-foot) Siachen glacier.

Thousands of Indian and Pakistani soldiers are posted on the Siachen glacier -- situated in northern Kashmir close to the Chinese border -- where altitude, icy temperatures and accidents have claimed more lives than enemy fire.

The two sides fought regular artillery duels in the region until November 2003, when a ceasefire was agreed along the heavily-militarised Line of Control in Kashmir.

Analysts say Siachen is of little strategic value, but the Indian army -- which has occupied most of the high-altitude battlefield since 1987 -- wants existing troop positions marked out to dissuade Pakistan from moving its soldiers forward in the event of a pull-out.

Pakistan, which claims all of Kashmir, fears that drawing down its positions would be tacit acceptance of India's claims to Siachen and the area as a whole.