



PHOTO: AFP

Leader of Nepal's Maoists Prachanda speaks to business leaders, human rights activists and journalists during a meeting organised by the party in Kathmandu Friday. The former rebel leader said Maoists planned to launch protests next month to push for the immediate ouster of King Gyanendra before crucial polls set for November.

Maoists want deferral of Nepali election

Rebels plan protests for king's exit

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, AFP, Kathmandu

Even as Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala pledged that the twice-deferred critical election would be held without fail in November, Maoist guerrillas said the polls should be put off till next year as they had been "backstabbed" by the political parties.

With less than three months left for the November 22 constituent assembly election, Maoist chief Prachanda has proposed that the exercise be now held in April 2008 so that it would be "real" instead of being a mockery it would be if held this year.

Speaking at a public programme here on Friday, Prachanda finally put into words what Nepali analysts and political leaders had been

fearing all along that the Maoists are fearful of doing badly at the polls due to the militant activities of their trade, youth and student wings, and so are trying to buy time.

An internal poll conducted by one of the leading parties in the coalition government, the Communist party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist, reportedly predicts that the rebels would not muster more than 10 percent votes due to their growing unpopularity.

The recently concluded meeting of Maoist representatives also indicates mounting differences in the party and dissatisfaction with the current leadership.

Prachanda, however, is defending his proposal to defer the election on the ground that with hundreds of supporters missing since the start of their "People's War" and their fami-

lies facing hardships, it would be inhuman to ask them for votes instead of rehabilitating them first.

He is also demanding a round table conference with the representatives of the various groups currently holding separate protest movements so that the disputes are addressed before the election.

Finally, the rebels are also urging the government to abolish monarchy before the election, alleging that the polls would not be free and fair as long as King Gyanendra held a vestige of power.

Nepal's Maoist leader said Friday the former rebels planned to launch protests next month to push for the immediate ouster of King Gyanendra before crucial polls set for November.

The former guerrillas, now in government after signing a land-

mark peace deal last year with mainstream political parties, had agreed to wait until after the polls that will decide whether the country becomes a republic.

But Maoist leader Prachanda said they now want Gyanendra to go right away.

"To push for a republic, it's imperative to launch protests from inside government, in parliament and on the streets," Prachanda told business leaders, human rights activists and journalists at a meeting organised by the party.

The Maoist proposal comes as Nepal's major donors, including India, the European Union and US, said the government would lose its credibility if the elections were postponed yet again.

Bush admn raps Iran over Iraq unrest

AFP, Crawford

The White House warned Friday that alleged Iranian weapons flows into Iraq were at odds with Tehran's public statements that it wants to help stabilise its war-torn neighbour.

"We've made it very clear that Iranian activity inside Iraq has not been helpful," national security spokesman Gordon Johndroe told reporters as US President George W. Bush spent time on his Texas ranch.

Johndroe accused Iran of being two-faced in its dealings with the United States, pointing to recent talks between top officials from Tehran and the US Ambassador in Baghdad, Ryan Crocker.

"The Iranians state publicly every time they meet with Ambassador Crocker that they want to play a constructive role inside Iraq. Yet, according to our commanders on the ground, we see an increased flow of very deadly explosively formed projectiles. That is not playing a constructive role in Iraq," he said.

Ex-rebels work with US military in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

American forces in Iraq are working with a Sunni former insurgent group to root out al-Qaeda cells fighting north of Baghdad, a commander said on Saturday, branding his new allies "patriots". Colonel David Sutherland said fighters from the Brigades of the 1920 Revolution acted as scouts and informants for US and Iraqi forces during a recent operation to secure an area around Baquba, capital of Diyala Province.

"The 1920s as they are called, again we call them Baquba Guardians," he told reporters. "We call them concerned local nationals. These are people, patriots that have come forward and joined the security process."

"They are working with my soldiers, they are working with Iraqi security forces to assist us with information with being the eyes and ears."

20 killed in Afghan unrest

AFP, Ghazni

A roadside bomb killed three private security guards yesterday while two policemen and 15 Taliban died in fighting overnight in fresh violence in Afghanistan, officials said.

Two guards were also injured by the bomb that struck their vehicle on a road in Zahir district of Kandahar province, provincial police commander, Sayed Aqa Saqib told AFP.

Separately, nine Taliban rebels and a policeman were killed in intense fighting Friday night in Ghazni Province, a district administration official said.

The clashes in the remote, Taliban-dominated Giru district

lasted several hours, official Mahboob-Ullah told AFP.

"The bodies of the enemy casualties have been recovered. One of our policemen was martyred," he said.

In another incident Friday night in eastern Paktika province Taliban rebels clashed with police in which six insurgents were killed and a policeman also died, the interior ministry said.

Two policemen were also injured in the clash in Khushmand district of the troubled province.

Ghazni, south of the capital Kabul is an insurgency-hit region, where Taliban have been holding 19 South Korean hostages since around mid last month.

The rebels have threatened to kill their captives unless the government free some of their jailed fighters in its prisons, a demand Kabul has strongly rejected.

The Koreans, from a Christian church aid group, were seized while driving through Ghazni to the main southern province of Kandahar, another rebel hotspot.

The Taliban has been waging a bloody insurgency, which has claimed thousands of lives, including civilians, international forces and their own fighters, since they were toppled from government in Afghanistan in late 2001.

Maoists torch CPI(M) party office in Nadia

PTI, Kalyani, West Bengal

Suspected Maoists torched CPI(M) office in Nadia district in the West Bengal state early yesterday, police said.

The Maoists left behind some leaflets at the site in Poragachha.

Party MP Alokesh Das also claimed the incident was the handiwork of the Maoists.

Recently, the ultra left rebels snatched four rifles -two each in Nadia and in neighbouring Murshidabad districts - from policemen.



PHOTO: AFP

Locals try to extinguish a fire burning on the Mount Taygete, in the Peloponnese region of Greece yesterday. Greece has battled multiple forest fires since June after several heatwaves and months of drought.

Sr Pak army officer among 4 kidnapped

AFP, Wana

Suspected militants have kidnapped a senior Pakistani army officer and three others in a restive tribal region bordering Afghanistan, officials said yesterday.

Colonel Shahid Kiyani of Bajaur Scouts, two soldiers and an administration official were seized at gunpoint in the town of Ladha in South Waziristan late Friday.

"They were on their way to a seminary to meet with some religious leaders when gunmen in two vehicles intercepted them," local administration chief Rasool Khan told AFP.

He said the local authorities and tribal elders are trying to secure the release of the kidnapped officials through talks with the leaders of the powerful Mehsud tribe.

The authorities are also trying to free 15 paramilitary soldiers kidnapped earlier this month in the same region. Militants beheaded one of them two weeks ago.

In neighbouring North Waziristan, meanwhile, three tribesmen were killed Saturday when an army attack helicopter fired on a vehicle after shots were fired at an army convoy from a hotel.

N-deal needs to be debated: Yashwant

PTI, Jamshedpur

The Indo-US civil nuclear deal needs to be debated as it would have a long-term impact on the country's nuclear programme, BJP Vice-President Yashwant Sinha said yesterday.

"I am not interested in the prevailing differences within the UPA, but I am certainly concerned about the proposed deal, which, if implemented, will leave the country at the mercy of the US for our future nuclear programmes," the former external affairs minister said in Jamshedpur.

"The deal is not the issue of an

individual party, but a serious issue concerning the entire nation in view of security concerns and needed to be debated," he said.

He said the country's nuclear facilities would be directly under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) if the deal was operationalised.

Stating that India has already made clear of its peaceful intentions in the nuke issue, he said, the sole objective of the deal was to stall the country's nuclear programme and the US would derive commercial benefit from it.

Vajpayee still in hospital, but stable

PTI, New Delhi

Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee continued to be in hospital, but doctors attending on him said his condition was stable.

"He is progressing well and his vital signs are stable," AIIMS spokesman Shakti Gupta told PTI. But he refused to say when he would be discharged from the hospital.

The 83-year-old BJP leader was admitted to AIIMS in New Delhi on August 21 after he complained of giddiness and drowsiness. Vajpayee was admitted to the private ward in the Cardio-Thoracic and Neuro-Sciences Centre.

"Reports of all the tests, including MRI, CT and ECG, are normal. We will review his condition on Saturday, before deciding on when he could be discharged," Gupta said.

UN extends Lebanon peace force

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council Friday extended for another year the mandate of the UN's peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, strengthened after the Israeli-Hezbollah war in August 2006.

In its unanimously adopted, French-drafted resolution 1773, the council "Commends the positive role of Unifil (the UN force), whose deployment together with the Lebanese Armed Forces has helped to establish a new strategic environment in Southern Lebanon."

It also appealed "to all parties concerned to respect the cessation of hostilities" and the Blue Line which demarcates the Lebanon-Israel border.