

Nepal hit by strike as political tensions mount

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's ethnically tense south was hit by an indefinite strike launched yesterday, compounding a fuel shortage in the impoverished and landlocked nation's capital and fears for the peace process.

The strike in the Terai region is the latest protest action by the Mahadhesi minority, who are seeking greater autonomy for a region hit by a year of violence that has left at least 200 people dead.

"All transportation services have come to a halt and markets, schools remained shut today," Bholi Prasad Shivakoti, chief district officer from the southern town of Birgunj, told AFP.

The strike across the south has hit the capital hard, as the Terai is the only route to bring in petrol, diesel, cooking gas and kerosene to the landlocked nation from sole

supplier India.

Kathmandu was already facing an acute fuel shortage as tanker drivers in recent weeks have been refusing to drive through the Terai, an oil official said.

"Frequent protests and threats by various groups in the Terai have reduced the morale of the tanker drivers who are unwilling to take risks," Mukunda Prasad Dhungel, an official from the state-run Nepal Oil Corporation, told AFP.

"Unless the government improves the security situation in the southern plains we will not be able to get normal fuel supply into Kathmandu," he warned.

Chief district officer Shivakoti said Mahadhesi activists forced people to close their shops in Birgunj, 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Kathmandu, although he said that "so far the situation has

remained peaceful."

Around two dozen armed ethnic groups have emerged in the Terai region since mainstream parties and former Maoist rebels signed a peace deal in November 2006 and formed an interim government that Mahadhesi activists say still excludes politicians from the lowlands.

Last weekend, three different groups representing the minority formed an alliance for what they called "a final revolt" against the country's government, which is itself riven by tensions ahead of national elections set for April 10.

Protests were reported elsewhere in the region bordering India, home to around half of Nepal's 27 million population and known as the country's bread basket.

Authorities in Kathmandu said

they were ready for dialogue but warned any fresh violence would not be tolerated.

"The government is always ready for dialogue but we have not got any response from them," said state minister for home affairs Ram Kumar Chaudhary.

"We have made necessary arrangements to maintain law and order in the Terai region. If protesters turn violent, the state would not remain silent."

But a Mahadhesi leader said a mere offer of talks was not enough.

"We are not against the talks with the government but we will only sit for meaningful talks," said Rajendra Mahato, leader of the Nepal Sadbhawana Party.

"The state must give clear views on guaranteeing a federal state structure with greater autonomy and the right to self-determination before we sit for talks."



Democratic presidential hopeful Sen Barack Obama (D-IL) speaks during a primary campaign rally at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wisconsin, on Tuesday.

Malaysian PM dissolves parliament for snap polls

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi dissolved parliament yesterday to pave the way for snap elections which are expected to see the ruling coalition's majority eroded.

Abdullah's popularity has plummeted as the nation is beset by mounting racial tensions, unprecedented street protests, anger over rising fuel and food prices, and high crime rates.

Announcing that the king had consented to dissolve parliament, Abdullah indicated he did not expect a repeat of the 2004 landslide when the Barisan Nasional coalition seized some 90 percent of

parliamentary seats.

"2004 was a special election and it was extraordinary. I pray that BN will get at least two-thirds of the votes in the upcoming election," he told a press conference.

"I hope voters will understand the issues affecting our country objectively," he said, adding that the Election Commission would decide on the polling date.

Voting must be held 60 days after parliament is dissolved, but the government traditionally allows just a two-week campaign period, which would mean the ballot in early March.

Abdullah appealed for calm during the campaign, in an apparent reference to a string of public

rallies over the past few months which police have broken up with tear gas and water cannon.

"My hope is that during the voting, nothing untoward will happen -- there will be no disturbances or trouble that will affect the voting process," he said.

Abdullah heads the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) which leads the Barisan Nasional (National Front) multi-racial coalition that holds 200 of the 219 seats in parliament.

The Chinese-based Democratic Action Party holds 12, the fundamentalist Islamic party PAS has six and Keadlan which is led by the wife of dissident former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim has one seat.

Serbia, Russia demand UN meet on Kosovo

AFP, Ljubljana

Serbia and Russia have demanded an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Kosovo's moves toward independence, EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said yesterday.

She said ahead of an EU-Russia summit in the Slovenian capital that Serbia and Russia wanted the Security Council to meet on Thursday to discuss the Serbian province's vow to unilaterally breakaway.

The anticipated declaration of independence could come as soon as Sunday.

Ferrero-Waldner along with EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and Dmitri Rupel, the foreign minister for Slovenia which currently holds the European Union presidency, are set to meet Wednesday with Russia's top diplomat Sergei Lavrov, with Kosovo high on their agenda.

"We do hope to be able to convince Russia that the status quo (in Kosovo) is unsustainable," Ferrero

Waldner said.

Russia yesterday expressed hopes that an urgent UN meeting on the status of Kosovo would take place "in the coming days," the foreign ministry's special representative to the Balkans Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

Moscow backs Serbia's position that majority ethnic Albanian province's decision to breakaway from Belgrade would be in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Pakistan tests N-capable missile

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani troops fired a short-range nuclear-capable ballistic missile during exercises yesterday in the third such training launch in as many weeks, the army said.

Soldiers from the country's strategic force command carried out a "successful" launch of the Hatf III (Ghaznavi) missile, which has a range of 290 kilometres, an armystatement said.

The launch was witnessed by caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Mian Soomro and army chief Ashfaq Kayani, the statement added, saying that more details would be announced later.

Pakistan and India have routinely conducted missile tests since the nuclear-armed South Asian neighbours carried out tit-for-tat atomic detonations in May 1998.

However in 2004 they launched a slow-moving peace process aimed at ending six decades of hostility and resolving their dispute over the Himalayan territory of Kashmir, the cause of two of their three wars.

In February 2007 Pakistan and India signed a deal to cut the risk of atomic weapons accidents.

India's tiger population declines

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's tiger population has declined by more than half in the last five years from 3,500 in 2002 to 1,411 in 2007, according to the latest census by the government.

Releasing the figures of the census here on Tuesday evening, Rajesh Gopal, Secretary of National Tiger Conservation Authority, attributed the sharp fall in the number of big cats to poaching, loss of quality habitat and prey.

The tiger count, which took nearly two years to complete, found the tigers in the forest areas of 17 states with Madhya Pradesh topping the list with 300 big cats.

Wildlife enthusiasts and environmentalists have since long voiced concern over the dwindling number of tigers and over poaching.

Alarmed by the decline in the tiger population, the government last year announced it was recruiting retired army personnel to form a tiger protection force.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had last month set up a National Wildlife Crime Prevention Bureau comprising police and customs personnel and environmentalists in a bid to save the tigers from poachers.

Abducted envoy still alive, says Pak foreign office

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's foreign office said yesterday it was "sure" that the country's ambassador to Afghanistan is still alive after being abducted in a tribal region where Islamic militants are active.

It would not however confirm television reports that Taliban rebels were holding the envoy and had demanded that a senior militant commander captured in Pakistan be released in exchange.

Envoy Tariq Azizuddin was heading to the Afghan capital Kabul with his driver when he disappeared in the troubled Khyber tribal district bordering Afghanistan on Monday, sparking a huge search operation.

The foreign office has only confirmed that Azizuddin is missing but a top official in the rugged area said it was "clear" that he had been kidnapped, although it is not known by whom.

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Bomb kills 3 Afghan soldiers

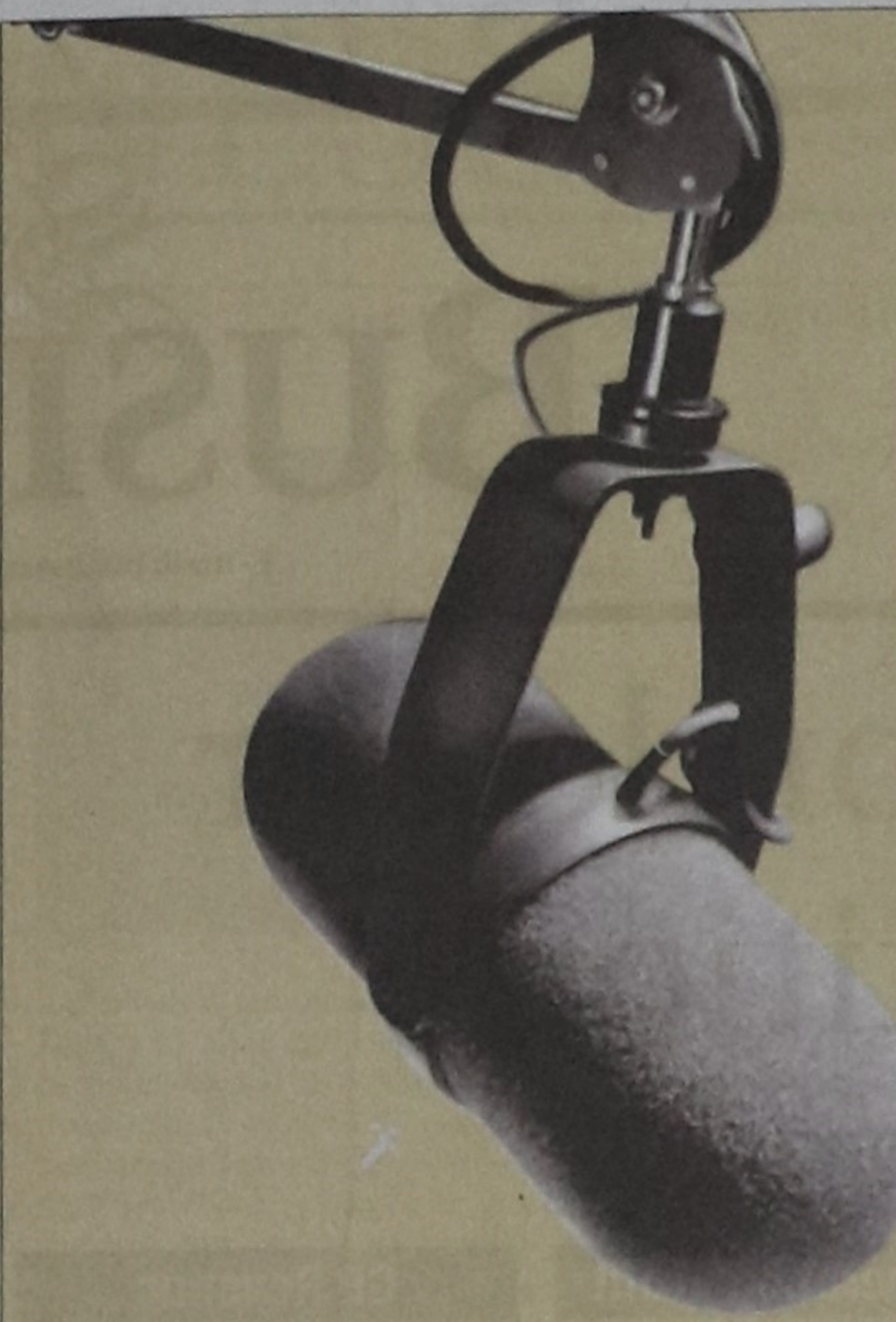
AFP, Kandahar, Afghanistan

A bomb ripped into an Afghan army convoy near a former Taliban stronghold yesterday, killing three soldiers a day after gunmen attacked the home of the area's leader, the official said.

The force of the blast knocked one of the vehicles out of the convoy in the Musa Qala district, district chief Abdul Salaam told AFP.

"Three soldiers were martyred and three others were wounded and their vehicle was destroyed," said Salaam, a former Taliban commander who was appointed district chief after the town was retaken from militants in December.

Salaam also said Taliban gunmen had on Tuesday attacked his house about 10 kilometres (six miles) from the town.



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English News Editing

- Producer (2) ■ Associate and Assistant Producer (2) ■ Trainee Producer (1)
- Masters degree preferably in Journalism, English, Economics and Law. Educational qualifications may be relaxed for candidates having experience in journalism. Except for the senior posts, maximum age should be 35 years.
- Except for the senior positions, other posts require experience in print or electronic media. Reporters must have experience of working in different bits. Experience not required for the trainees.

Program

- Producer (2) ■ Associate and Assistant Producer (1) ■ Trainee Producer (2)
- Masters. Educational qualifications may be relaxed for candidates having experience in media. Age maximum 35 years except for the senior candidates.
- Work experience in print or electronic media is required. Experience is not required for the trainees.
- Working experience in radio station will be considered as an added advantage.

Fluency in spoken Bengali and English along with lucid and accurate pronunciation is must for the posts mentioned above. The producers and reporters have to work in and outside the newsroom; have to prepare and read news; and have to produce as well as broadcast various programs on current affairs.

Research and Archive

- Researcher (2) ■ Archive Officer (1)
- Masters. Educational qualifications may be relaxed for candidates having experience in media.

- Candidates having experience in print or electronic media can apply. Working experience in radio will be considered as an added advantage. Age maximum 35 years.
- The researchers will work on news, current affairs and entertainment programs. They will also be expected to contribute ideas for programs and monitor popularity of different programs.
- Necessary skill to make and maintain electronic archive is a pre-condition for the Archive Department.

Sound Editor or Sound Engineer

- Sound Engineer/Sound Editor/Assistant Sound Editor (6)
- Graduate. Educational qualifications may be relaxed for candidates having experience in this area. Maximum age: 35 years.
- Working experience in recording studios or electronic media is required to work in Newsroom and Programs.
- Interest in music and working experience in radio will be considered as added advantage.
- Applicants have to go through skill test for selection.

Technical

- Transmitter Engineer/Shift Engineer (3)
- Graduation/diploma degree in electronics.
- Maximum age: 35 years. Age limit may be relaxed for deserving candidates.
- Candidates having experience with VHF/UHF transmitter can apply for the posts.

IT Department

- IT Manager/Administrator/Engineer (3)
- Graduate. Diploma/degree in computer science and engineering will get preference. Age maximum 35 years.
- Working experience in radio/TV is required. Both theoretical and practical knowledge on broadcasting software, sound software, networking, troubleshooting, Windows and Linux server is essential.

Electrical

- Electrical Engineer/Electrician (3)
- BSC/diploma in electrical engineering would get preference. Age maximum 35 years.
- Working experience in radio/TV is required for these posts.

Marketing

- Marketing Executive (3)
- Minimum Graduate. Age maximum 35 years.
- Candidates having work experience in print or electronic media will get preference.
- Enthusiasm in work and efficiency (oral and script) in Bengali and English is required.

Others

- Receptionist cum Telephone Operator (3)
- Office Assistant (5)
- Graduation is required for Receptionist cum Telephone Operators. Maximum Age: 25 years.
- Efficiency in Bengali and English is required. Anyone with working experience in media would get preference.
- Office Assistants must have SSC degree. Maximum age: 25 years. Candidates with working experience in the media will get preference.



Last date of submission: February 25, 2008.
Applicants are requested to drop CV with photographs & other necessary documents:

abc radio
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