

Major parties may not join next Maoist-led govt

Nepali king asked to bow out 'gracefully'

PTI, AFP, Kathmandu

Key parties in Nepal's ruling alliance have indicated they may not join the next government to be formed under the leadership of Maoists, who have emerged as the surprise single largest victors in the landmark Constituent Assembly polls.

"We have not given big emphasis to joining the government and the Nepali Congress (NC) has not yet made up its mind on whether to join the new government or not," said NC central committee member and newly-elected legislator Narahari Acharya.

"Now we are focussing on drafting the new Constitution which is

very important at the moment and we have not yet discussed the matter relating to joining the government." As the people have given the mandate to Maoists to form the government, it is up to them to decide how they would form it, he said.

Another Nepali Congress leader Mahesh Acharya, a close aide of Prime Minister G P Koirala, said the party's Central Working Committee would decide whether to join the government or not.

Their remarks came in the wake of Maoists coming closer to securing majority of seats in the 601-member Constituent Assembly for which the elections were held on April 10.

Acting General Secretary of CPN-UML, Amrit Bohara, said Maoists have not yet discussed the government formation matter with his party.

"We are committed to drafting a democratic Constitution to establish a federal democratic republic and our efforts will be directed towards that at present," he said.

CPN-UML, one of the major coalition partners, has already decided to ask its ministers to quit the present government following its humiliating defeat in the polls.

Meanwhile, Nepal's Maoists, on track for victory in landmark elections, yesterday called on the country's embattled king to step down

"gracefully" or else face a humiliating eviction from his palace.

The call came as the former rebels maintained a strong lead in the count from last Thursday's vote on the impoverished country's political future.

The Maoists so far look set to dominate a 601-seat assembly that will rewrite Nepal's constitution, and have said their first act will be to sack King Gyanendra and abolish his 240-year-old monarchy.

"The best thing for the king would be to bow out gracefully to pave the way for a democratic republic," Baburam Bhattarai, the Maoists' second-in-command, told AFP.



Indian bystanders gather around as an upturned bus is lifted from the Narmada Canal at Bodli, some 170kms south of Ahmedabad yesterday. At least 44 people, most of them children on their way to school, drowned when their bus plunged into the canal in the western Indian state of Gujarat.

Left takes on govt over price spiral in Lok Sabha

PTI, New Delhi

Friends and foes targeted the Congress-led ruling coalition in the Lok Sabha yesterday over "failure" to check the price spiral with the CPI wondering whether there was any government in place.

The key Left party, supporting the Congress-led coalition for the past 4 years, regretted that its experiment of backing the UPA might have failed.

"I am sorry. We supported them for four years... The experiment might have failed. Government is out of place", CPI leader Gurudas Dasgupta said initiating a special discussion on price rise.

An adjournment motion on the issue for which notice had been given by BJD's Braj Kishore Mohanty was not admitted by Speaker Somnath Chatterjee.



Palestinians clean the rubble at a mosque in the Shujaiya neighbourhood of Gaza City yesterday. Israeli troops backed by assault helicopters stormed into the Gaza Strip early Wednesday and battled heavily armed militants, killing four Hamas fighters and reportedly losing three of their own men.

Pak civilian forces should control military: Rice

THE DAILY TIMES, Washington

United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said here on Tuesday that, "Pakistan now will need to find a way to have very solid civilian control of the armed forces."

She said, "We salute the Pakistani people for courageously restoring their democracy." She was addressing air force officers at a US base in Alabama. She called the return of a civilian government to Pakistan as "a really terrific step for the people of Pakistan" for which they should be congratulated despite a lot of threats from extremists and efforts to

disrupt the elections. She said, in answer to a question from a Pakistani air force officer, "Now, we will engage the armed forces in military training and in military co-operation in the way that we do militaries around the world, many of them from democratic countries... I believe that our tradition of that is a good one, in which Pakistani officers can come and be a part of a democratic state in which civilian control is really now taken for granted, but wasn't always taken for granted, so we've built the institutions off."

Rice said, "I believe that the coming of a democratic government in Pakistan is a new strategic opportu-

nity. It is an opportunity for an ally in the war on terror. But remember that our answer to terrorism is not just to fight and defeat the terrorists; it is to deal with the conditions that produce terrorism, and the absence of freedom is one of the conditions that produces terrorism. Perhaps the most important condition is the absence of freedom. And so when we see an ally in the war on terror makes a transition to democracy, it could not be more affirming of everything that President Bush believes about the power of democracy, the power of those principles, and their power to defeat terrorism long term."

3 Israeli soldiers, 4 militants killed in Gaza raids

AFP, Gaza City

Three Israeli soldiers and four militants were killed on Wednesday as troops backed by assault helicopters stormed into the Gaza Strip and battled heavily armed Palestinians.

The clashes marked the second eruption of violence in a week in the Hamas-led Palestinian territory.

"Three soldiers were killed and three were wounded in an exchange of fire" with gunmen who had approached the security fence between Israel and Gaza near the Nahal Oz crossing and fuel terminal, an army spokeswoman said.

Hamas claimed it killed the soldiers in a "sophisticated ambush."

Four activists of the Islamist movement were killed in the same area, Palestinian medics said.

The militants of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, were killed by members of an Israeli unit backed by helicopters.

Six other brigades members were captured and taken back to Israel by the soldiers at dawn, the sources said.

The army was involved in several clashes, the military spokeswoman said, adding that Palestinians had used anti-tank missiles and mortars. Palestinian gunmen were hit when troops called in air support.

The latest casualties bring to 396 the number of people killed, most of them Gaza militants, since Israel and the Palestinians relaunched formal peace talks at a US confer-

ence in November, according to an AFP count.

Wednesday's clashes came exactly one week after Palestinian gunmen killed two Israeli civilians who worked at the Nahal Oz terminal, which supplies all of Gaza's fuel. Seven Palestinians were killed in the direct aftermath of the daring attack.

Israel halted all fuel deliveries to Gaza after the April 9 attack, but announced they would resume supplies to the Gaza electricity plant on Wednesday.

The United Nations said the announcement fell well short of what is needed in the impoverished, overpopulated territory, which is under a crippling Israeli embargo.

"The current absence of fuel at petrol stations has meant that normal transportation has ceased, many students have been unable to get to school and many health professionals have been unable to get to hospitals and clinics," UN agencies working in the occupied Palestinian territories said in a joint statement on Tuesday.

"There have been difficulties transporting essential items such as food throughout Gaza," the statement said.

The UN agencies said that even before the attack on Nahal Oz, the amount of fuel delivered by Israel to Gaza was "inadequate to fulfil Gaza's requirements."

The territory was receiving just 3.8 million litres of diesel and 340,000 litres of benzene, compared with more than 8.8 million litres and 1.7 million litres respectively a year previously.

Talks on with Taliban to end violence

Says Afghan opposition

AP, Kabul

An opposition group says its leaders, including a former president, have been meeting with the Taliban and other anti-government groups in hopes of negotiating an end to rising violence in Afghanistan.

The contacts have taken place between leaders of the opposition National Front and "high level" militant leaders during the last few months, party spokesman Sayyid Agha Hussain Fazel Sancharak said in an interview Sunday.

He said among those at the meetings were former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, now a member of parliament, and Mohammad Qasim Fahim, who is President Hamid Karzai's security adviser and a powerful northern strongman.

Rabbani said Afghanistan's six-year war must be solved through talks, echoing a view held by many in the country.

"There's no doubt that some inside the Taliban are not willing to negotiate, but there are some Taliban who are interested in solving problems through talks," Rabbani, Afghanistan's president from 1992-96, told The Associated Press in an interview.

"We in the National Front and I myself believe the solution for the political process in Afghanistan will happen through negotiations," he said.

Support for talks to end the increasingly bloody Afghan conflict have gained steam over the last year. President Hamid Karzai said for the first time in April 2007 that

he had met with Taliban militants in attempts to negotiate peace.

Rabbani said opposition leaders will soon discuss and possibly select a formal negotiating team and that Taliban fighters, in their talks with Karzai, have also proposed sending a formal team for talks with the government.

The behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings come just as the United States is pouring more troops into the country. Some 32,000 US forces are in Afghanistan, the most since the 2001 invasion to oust the Taliban for hosting al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Two Nato soldiers died and two others were wounded Wednesday in an explosion in southern Afghanistan, the military alliance said.

It did not disclose the nationalities of the casualties or the exact location of the blast. The wounded were evacuated to a military base for treatment, Nato said in a statement.

Despite the violence and heightened military posture, US ambassador William Wood has said the US supports talks with militants who will lay down arms and recognise the Afghan constitution. The US does not support talks with al-Qaeda fighters.

Across the border in Pakistan, where militant violence has spiked over the last year, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani late last month offered talks to militants ready to renounce violence there.

Negotiations will ultimately be the only way to end the Afghan

conflict, said Wadiri Safi, a professor of public and international law at Kabul University.

"Negotiations," he said. "Find the address of all of the Taliban, find out what they want. They will have their own suggestions, and if it's not anti-civilization, you can come to terms with them instead of spending money on military budgets."

Karzai, in a news conference this month, said the National Front efforts are good for the country. He said many rebels are Afghans who need to be brought back into society. For months, Karzai has trumpeted reconciliation, even offering to meet with Taliban leader Mullah Omar.

But the National Front says Karzai has not followed up his words with action. He needs to put a formal negotiations process in place involving all parties, Rabbani said.

"I told Karzai that when a person starts something he should complete it. On the issue of the negotiations it is not right to take one step forward and then one step back," he said. "This work should be continued in a very organized way."

Rabbani and Sancharak declined to say who the National Front has met with. Sancharak said their militant interlocutors were "important people."

The Taliban, through spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, denied there had been any contact. "If they are claiming they have contact with somebody, we don't know who," he said.

CALL FOR TENDERS

COMPETITION FOR ARCHITECTURAL, CONSULTANCY AND ENGINEERING SERVICES Construction of Maison Franco-Allemande in Bangladesh

A] CLIENT / CONTRACTING AUTHORITY:

A.1) Contracting Authority :

The French Republic – Ministry of External and European Affairs
Embassy of France in Bangladesh
Road 108 – House 18, Gulshan – P.O. Box 22, BD-1212 Dacca
Tel. : 880.28.81.38.11 / Fax : 880.28.82.36.12 / E-mail : ambafr@ambafrance-bd.fr

A.2) Representative for the Contracting Authority:

* for technical and administrative information:
Embassy of France in New Delhi
Property Regional Department / Mr. Delfosse and Ms. Malliat
2/50-E Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi – 110021
Tel. : 00.91.11.24.19.61.90 / 40 / 00 – Fax : 00.91.11.24.19.61.19 / E-mail : <http://www.france-in-india.org/>
* for all correspondence related to procedure:
Embassy of France in Bangladesh in Dacca
Mr. Jean-Yves Merlet – Head, Financial Department
Road 108 – House 18, Gulshan – P.O. Box 22, BD-1212 Dhaka
Tel. : 880.28.82.33.20 / Fax : 880.29.88.38.51
Working hours (local time): from Sunday to Thursday 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

B] PROJECT :

B.1) Title:

Construction of the « Maison franco-allemande » for housing the Embassies of France and Germany in Bangladesh

B.2) Brief Description:

This project plans the construction of a three- or four-storey building without a basement with a total carpet area of 1,600 sq m² approx. capable of housing around 70 workstations. This being essentially an office building receiving the public, it must be in compliance with the security and functioning requirements of European diplomatic representations established in Bangladesh. It will be located on a site measuring 8,000 m² approx. (available construction area 5,700 m² approx.) in the diplomatic enclave of Baridhara. This site, bordered by three roads, close to the Embassies of the United States, China, Thailand, etc. already houses the French school building occupying an area of 2,000 m² approx. (constructed in 1994). This building being a unique bi-national project, the designers must confer on its architecture an unusual character, blending three cultures, French, German and Bangladeshi, in a spirit of modernity, sobriety and efficacy.

B.3) Location:

The construction site is located at n°2, Madani Avenue in the Baridhara neighbourhood in Dacca, Bangladesh.

C] PROCEDURE / COMPETITION AND TENDER BID RULES :

C.1) Type of procedure :

This is a restricted call for Architectural, Consultancy and Engineering Services (based on pre-selection of candidates) based on concept stage (sketches) and preliminary design (architectural, functional and technical). This procedure is divided in two phases; the first consists of pre-selecting several teams on the basis of capacities, competences and references, following a public tender call; the second would be the selection of the best project submitted by the candidates pre-selected on the basis of their project blueprints.

C.2) Professions selected and Objective of the Contract :

The invitation to tender is reserved for multidisciplinary teams (including architect, consultant, engineer, project manager, supervisor...) whose representative should be an architect eligible to practise his profession in Bangladesh and in a position to undertake the necessary procedures for obtaining the relevant permit(s) to execute this project in Dacca. This assignment entrusted to a team selected after bids, will be a project spanning the concept stage and preliminary designs to the completion of the works, including assistance for the establishment of the works completion report before handing over the completed construction to the Contracting Authority.

C.3) Documents to be submitted by candidates:

Each candidate or team must produce the following documents:
- presentation and organizational note on the team, specifically mentioning the composition and means deployed in Bangladesh.
- a detailed reference file on new constructions for equivalent operations (public buildings, office buildings, etc.) in Bangladesh and the region (India, Pakistan), specifying for each, the composition of the team, title and description of the operation, the cost of the works, the projects assigned and the name and contact details of the contracting authorities.

- a graphic file (photos, charts, sections, etc.) of at least 5 representative operations of the applying architect and the team in A4 or A3 colour recto.

- a file presenting the means of the candidates, namely in terms of human and material resources, along with the bio-data of the chief in-charges and experts for the project, as well as an annual turnover statement of each candidate for the last 5 years and any other document relevant for evaluating the competences and resources of the candidate.

- the attestations mentioned in the following part (C.4).

C.4) Attestations to be produced by the candidate:

Each candidate or member of the applying team must produce affidavits, official attestations and/ or certificates from local competent authorities proving and attesting to the following:

- his/ her fiscal situation is in due order with regard to social and fiscal authorities of the country and that his/her latest contributions/dues have been paid;
- he/ she has not been convicted for offences relating to labour laws, commercial laws, and professional and civil obligations;
- he/ she is not insolvent, or under liquidation or any other equivalent procedure;
- he/ she has not been or is not convicted for a breach or fault affecting his/ her professional ethics, the practice of his/ her profession, subsequent to serious acts of corruption;
- he/ she has not been judged guilty of any act of corruption, money laundering or fraud or being part of any criminal organization;
- Apart from the abovementioned documents, each candidate or member of the bidding team must produce the following documents:
- proof of insurance for professional hazards;
- an admission certificate to the order or register of the profession engaged in;
- a bank attestation.

C.5) Place of submission and last date for receiving tenders:

The application files, constituted in accordance with the preceding articles (C.3 et C.4), must be submitted in sealed envelopes directly at the Embassy of France in Bangladesh (address mentioned in A.2) latest by **26th of May 2008** by 4 p.m. These files must be sent by a means permitting the certification of their submission before the abovementioned date and time, or by submitting them directly at the Embassy against a receipt, or through a courier service with acknowledgement due.

C.6) Criteria for analysis and selection of candidates (first phase):

The candidates' files will be verified for conformity with the specified requisites, then analyses based on the criteria of the most suitable and/ or interesting capacities, competences and references for this project. The classification will be by a local jury consisting of French and German representatives and associating at least one-third of professional members (architect, project manager, etc.)

C.7) Minimum and maximum number of candidates to be selected:

The maximum number of candidates selected for the second phase will be 5. The minimum number of acceptable candidates is fixed at 3.

C.8) Criteria for project analysis and remuneration (second phase):

The second phase of the bid will be based on the presentation of an architectural, functional and technical sketches and preliminary designs, with a scale model (1:200), along with a presentation and organizational note on the project and studies to be undertaken, a financial proposal for remunerating the team, as well as a financial estimate for the works. To this end, a designer's consultation dossier will be given to each candidate and will include at least an operations programme (scope of works), the bids result, and a draft contract. The projects will also be analysed and classified by a jury similar to the one for the first phase, based on the following criteria:

- practicality of the project and adherence to the schedule: 40%
- quality of architectural and environmental treatment: 35 %
- adherence to budget: 25%.

A remuneration will be given to each candidate, subject to his/her reply conforming to the programme and the rules and regulations governing the bids, fixed at 10,000 euros covering the submission of the scale model.

D] MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

D.1) Language :

The official language for this project will be English.

D.2) Jurisdiction:

The competent courts for this project will be the local jurisdiction.

D.3) Mode and date of publication:

This notice will be published in several European newspapers and magazines and in Bangladesh, and will be posted online on the websites of the Embassies concerned of France and Germany from 16th April 2008.