

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 victor 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 legislature 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

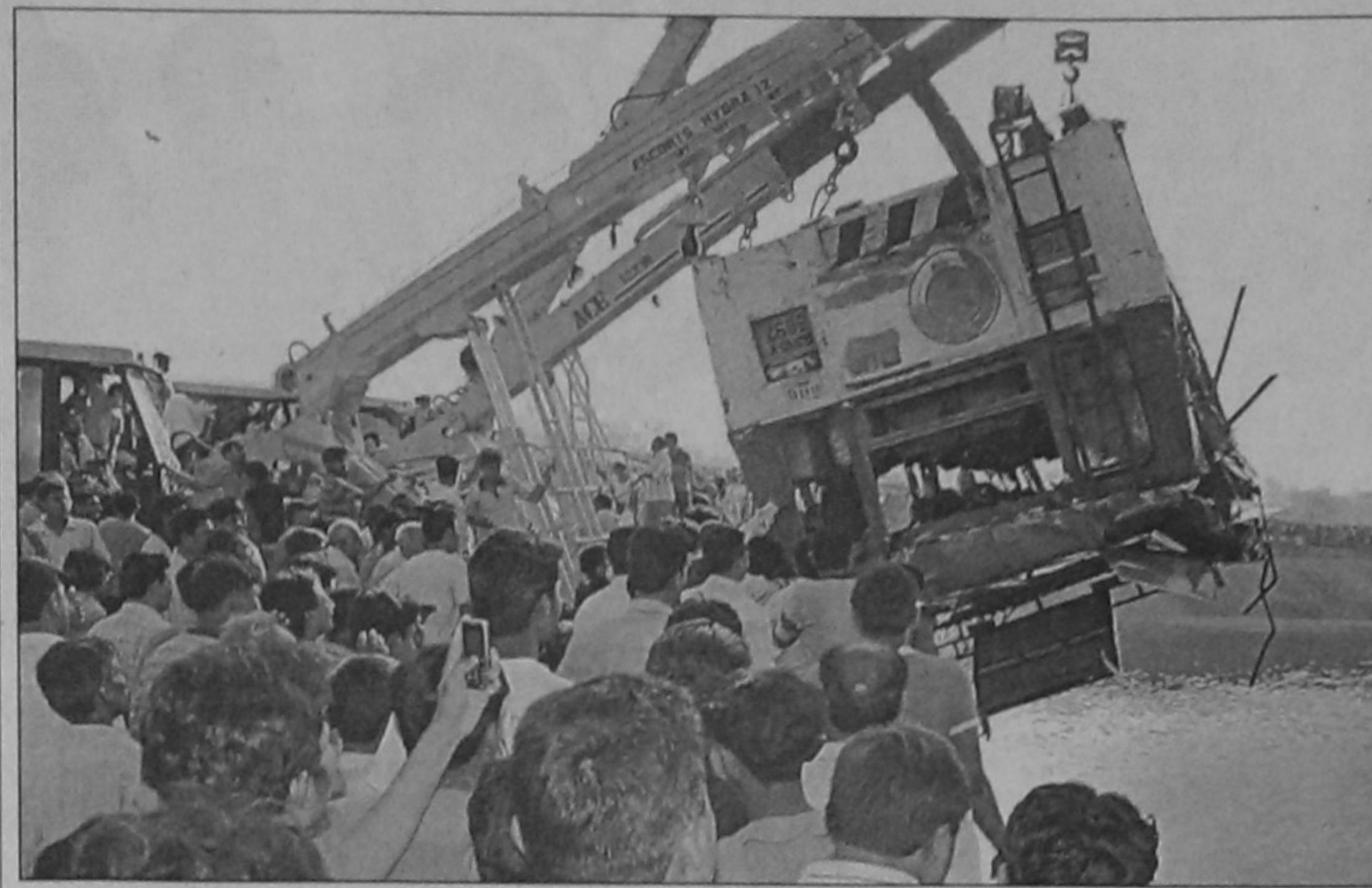
"gracefully" or else face a humiliating eviction from his palace.

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 Bodeli, 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.

PHOTO: AFP

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.



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' 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 conference 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 was 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 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."

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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.

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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.

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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 manoeuvres 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 Wadir 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 Sancharaki declined to say who the National Front had met with. Sancharaki 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. Mallart
2/50-E Shanti Path, 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 Dacca
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. 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 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-charge 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,