

Royalists call Kathmandu shutdown

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

With less than 100 days remaining for the promulgation of a new constitution that will decide whether Nepal should be a secular republic or revert to a Hindu kingdom, the only openly royalist party has called a shutdown of Kathmandu valley Monday to press for the restoration of the crown.

"We want the government to hold a referendum on three issues of national interest," said Rajaram Shrestha, former mayor of Kathmandu and a top leader of the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-Nepal), the only parliamentary party supporting monarchy.

"These are monarchy, a Hindu state and federalism."

Two years ago, Nepal held a historic constituent assembly election and the assembly members voted overwhelmingly to abolish monarchy and restructure the country into autonomous states.

Bomb kills 29 as US envoy visits Pakistan



US drone strike kills 4 militants

AP, AFP, Peshawar/ Miranshah

A bomb blast at a mosque in Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt killed 29 people including some militants yesterday, underscoring the relentless security threat here even as Pakistani-US cooperation against extremism appears on the upswing.

The attack in Khyber tribal region came as US special envoy Richard Holbrooke met with Pakistan's prime minister in Islamabad, the capital. It also followed revelations that Pakistani authorities have been picking up Afghan Taliban leaders on their soil, a longtime US demand.

The explosion tore through a mosque in the Aka Khel area of Khyber, killing at least 29 people and wounding some 50 others, local official Jawed Khan said. Earlier reports had said the blast occurred in the Orakzai area at a cattle market.

The two areas border one another, and the market is apparently near the mosque.

Officials were still investigating whether the explosion was caused by a suicide bomber or a planted device.

No group claimed responsibility, but

Khan said the dead included militants from Lashkar-e-Islam, an insurgent group in Khyber that has clashed with another militant outfit known as Ansarul Islam. Both espouse Taliban-style ideologies.

Meanwhile, two missiles fired from a US drone aircraft slammed into a militant compound in Pakistan's northwest tribal belt on Thursday, killing at least four Islamist insurgents, officials said.

The attack was the second US bombing raid in as many days in North Waziristan district, and hit a stronghold of the al-Qaeda-linked Haqqani network, known for staging attacks on US and Nato troops in Afghanistan.

"Two missiles hit a house. Four militants were killed, five were wounded. It was a militant compound," said a security official in Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan, which also borders Afghanistan.

A local administration official confirmed the toll in the US drone strike in the Dandey Darpa Khel area near Miranshah, while a security official in the area said that a car was also damaged in the bombing raid.

Earlier this week, officials confirmed

that a joint CIA-Pakistani security operation had captured the No 2 Afghan Taliban commander, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi.

On Thursday, an Afghan official told The Associated Press that around the same time some two weeks ago two Taliban leaders from northern Afghanistan also were arrested in Pakistan by Pakistani authorities.

The US and Pakistan have said very little on the record about the arrests, but they could signal a shift in Pakistani policy. Pakistan has long frustrated the Americans by either denying that the Afghan Taliban use its soil or doing little to root them out.

The arrests could mean that Pakistan has decided to turn on the Afghan Taliban, a group that it helped nurture as a strategic ally against longtime rival India, though some suspect the Pakistanis were forced to act because the US had solid intelligence on Baradar that it could not deny.

The arrests came as Western and Afghan troops fight the Taliban for control of Marjah town in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province.

UN envoy meets Suu Kyi party aides in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

The freed deputy of Aung San Suu Kyi's party met a UN rights envoy in military-ruled Myanmar Thursday and said the release of the Nobel Peace laureate was vital before elections, the opposition said.

UN special rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana held talks in the former capital Yangon with Tin Oo, the elderly vice chairman of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), and six other leading party members.

Myanmar's ruling junta freed 83-year-old Tin Oo from house arrest at the weekend. He was detained along with Suu Kyi in 2003 after a pro-regime mob attacked their motorcade, killing dozens of people.

"We had a free discussion with him for one hour. We discussed the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," Khin Maung Swe, one of those who attended the meeting with Quintana, told AFP.

Coup against Niger president

AFP, Niamey

Soldiers opened fire yesterday in the Niger capital -- where explosions and long bursts of gunfire resounded across the city -- in what a top French official said was an attempt against President Mamadou Tandja.

Witnesses said the firing appeared to be centred on the presidency. State radio stayed silent on events, concentrating on playing traditional music as tensions erupted in the uranium-rich West African nation.

Tandja, 71, has spent more than a decade in power, having extended his term through a controversial referendum last August after dissolving parliament and the constitutional court. Niger has since been isolated on the international stage.

It was not immediately known where Tandja was.

France urged its nationals to stay indoors. "We heard automatic gunfire and then large detonations. The house was shaking. It lasted about a half hour, non-stop," said Claire Deschamps, one French national living in Niamey.

She said the violence began around 1200 GMT. "There is a coup attempt" going on, a senior

French official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"All I can say is that it would appear that Tandja is not in a good position," he said.

Another witness said shooting had broken out around the presidential palace.

"The shots were directed at the president's office," said the witness, speaking from his workplace situated opposite the complex.

Sporadic shooting continued an hour later, an AFP correspondent who approached the palace said. Soldiers had deployed in the area and nearby streets were deserted.

The correspondent said he saw an armoured personnel carrier driven out of the palace gates before he was ordered away by a soldier.

After dissolving parliament, Tandja went on to stage parliamentary elections in October, which led the 15-nation West African regional bloc ECOWAS to suspend Niger's membership. The European Union suspended development aid and the United States imposed sanctions.

ECOWAS leaders meeting in Abuja on Tuesday urged all involved in the interim administration, including the military "not to put themselves up as candidates in the next elections".

Obama defies China with Dalai Lama meeting

AFP, Washington

Defying Chinese anger, US President Barack Obama on Thursday meets Tibet's exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who plans to seek assistance in finding a solution in his homeland.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureates will speak away from the cameras in the White House Map Room for a meeting the US administration calls private but which China has warned could worsen relations with the United States.

The Dalai Lama, who fled to India in 1959, landed in snowy Washington on Wednesday and joined a group of fellow exiles as they celebrated the Tibetan new year, Losar, at a hotel.

The 74-year-old Buddhist

monk greeted the Tibetan well-wishers, tasting milk and tea which children presented to him and throwing a ceremonial offering of rice over his shoulder.

Lodi Gyari, his lead negotiator in on-off dialog with China, said that the Dalai Lama hoped to speak to Obama both about global concerns and events in Tibet where China sent troops in 1950.

"His Holiness will be asking the president to help find a solution in resolving the Tibet issue that would be mutually beneficial to the Tibetan and Chinese people," Gyari said.

Beijing voices anger when any government leader meets with the Dalai Lama. It has demanded that the United States reverse its "wrong decision" to "avoid any more damage to Sino-US relations."



PHOTO: AFP

Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama (R) participates in a Tibetan New Year celebration as he arrives at the Park Hyatt hotel in Washington, DC, on Wednesday.



PHOTO: AFP

Debris is left after houses were burned down by suspected Maoists in an attack on Phulwaria village in Jamui, about 150 km from Patna on Thursday. Maoist rebels killed 12 villagers and burned down dozens of houses in an apparent revenge attack on suspected informers in eastern India.

Indian Maoists kill 12 in 'revenge' attack

AFP, AP, Patna

Maoist rebels killed 12 villagers and burned down dozens of houses in an apparent revenge attack on suspected informers in eastern India, police said yesterday.

More than 100 leftist guerrillas surrounded the village of Phulwaria in Bihar state late Wednesday night and began firing and detonating explosives, police director general US Dutt told AFP.

Dutt said 12 people were killed and six others abducted from the village, located 200km from the state capital Patna.

The rebels burned dozens of dwellings before leaving the village with their captives, he added.

A local police official said the Maoists suspected the

villagers had helped authorities arrest 11 rebels earlier this month, eight of whom were later killed.

Police said they believed the guerrillas had taken the kidnapped villagers into the thick jungles of neighbouring Jharkhand state, a Maoist stronghold.

India's Maoist insurgency began as a peasant uprising in 1967 and the rebels are currently active in a so-called "Red Corridor" of nine states stretching across north and eastern India.

They claim to be fighting for the rights of impoverished tribal people and other victims of state violence.

India has launched a security offensive in several Maoist-infested areas, but so far failed to significantly curb their operations.

Yemen rebels free Saudi soldiers as truce holds

AFP, Sanaa

Yemeni Shia rebels handed two Saudi soldiers over to mediators on Thursday, the defence ministry said, as a fledgling truce with the government in the northern mountains moved ahead.

"Two of the remaining four Saudi prisoners" were handed over to mediators, a ministry statement said.

The mediators will then take the soldiers to the capital Sanaa from where they will travel on to Saudi Arabia, it said.

A spokesman for the rebels said they had begun to hand over the remaining soldiers earlier on Thursday.

Help us build Ram temple, Gadkari tells Muslims

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Indore

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Nitin Gadkari Thursday called upon Muslims to help build a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Addressing the party's national council here, he said the BJP was fully committed to construct the temple at the site where the 16th century Babri mosque was razed by a mob in December 1992.

"Litigation is also pending for (the) resolution of this dispute, which may not offer a perfect solution because one party would lose and the other may win."

"Today, I appeal to the Muslim community to be generous towards the sentiments and feelings of Hindus and facilitate the construction of a grand Ram temple. This would herald a new amity and reinforce the bond for a resurgent India."

In an obvious attack on Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Nitin Gadkari said Thursday that his party did not believe in dynastic politics.

In his first presidential address at the BJP leadership meet here, he thundered that neither his father nor grandparents were prime ministers.

"I was a simple worker of a party and today I am its president. This can happen only in the BJP. The BJP is not like other political parties where dynasty rules," Gadkari said.

"My father was not the prime minister of the country, neither were my maternal great grandfather nor grandmother. We are a party with a difference."

No consensus on agenda for Indo-Pak talks as yet

ANI, New Delhi

With just a week left for the Foreign Secretary level talks the agenda of discussions still looks unclear.

Indian Foreign Minister SM Krishna has categorically said that Terrorism will remain the core of discussion and Pakistan is free to take up any issue of concern. But message is not clear to Islamabad, which is seeking more clarity on the statement and is adamantly

advocating the inclusion of Kashmir and Water in the talks.

Clearing the mist, Government sources here explain that it is not a "monologue" but a dialogue therefore terrorism should not be expected to be the focal point of discussion, However India's focus will remain on terrorism and Pakistan will raise issues of its concern they said.

Sources have told ANI that India is also likely to handover evidence of previous attacks

and also recent attack on German bakery in Poone.

Indian Foreign Minister has also clarified its stand that foreign secretary-level talks should not be seen as a resumption of composite dialogue, has further confounded Islamabad and diplomatic sources here have told ANI that Pakistan is viewing the resumption of formal talks at the foreign secretary level as the first step to the resumption of composite dialogue.

Archbishop Tutu is part of Bushman!

AFP, Paris

Scientists said Wednesday they had sequenced the genome of Bushmen, the longest-surviving lineage of modern humans, expanding our understanding of genetic diversity and inherited disease.

Comparison of DNA provided by a Bushman elder and South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu showed that Tutu is partly of Bushman heritage, they added.

The 78-year-old Nobel winner voiced "astonishment and delight" at the news, a researcher told AFP.

Bushmen is the collective term for linguistically-distinct groups of hunter-gatherers who inhabit the Kalahari Desert, which straddles parts of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

They are the oldest known continuous community of modern Homo sapiens, having lived in this sparsely-populated region for some 27,000 years.



PHOTO: AFP

This undated photo released by the University of New South Wales on Thursday shows Dr Vanessa Hayes (C) with study participant G/a'q'o (R) and his wife (L) from Namibia's northern Kalahari Desert. Scientists said they had sequenced the genome of Bushmen, the longest-surviving lineage of modern humans, expanding our understanding of genetic diversity and inherited disease.

Pak avalanche kills 20, buries 30 others

AFP, Islamabad

An avalanche killed at least 20 people yesterday in a remote mountain village in northern Pakistan where rescue workers struggled to free another 30 buried under snow and ice, police said.

The disaster struck in Kohistan district, which borders Pakistan's mountainous Northern Areas and is blanketed in snow for most of the harsh winter, hampering efforts to reach the stricken

area and help the survivors.

Seven people were also killed in a separate avalanche late Monday in the northern district of Chitral, with officials saying the remote location prevented them reaching the area earlier.

Police official Mohammad Sadiq said that rescue teams had recovered 20 dead bodies from the Kohistan avalanche about 220 kilometres (138 miles) north of the Pakistani capital Islamabad.

more people have been buried," he told AFP by telephone from Dasu, the main town in the area.

"The avalanche hit Kundian village... We fear that some women and children were also trapped," he said, adding that four houses were completely buried and other buildings were badly damaged.

Kundian village, about 75 kilometres from Dasu, is cut off with no phone or communication links, police said.

Advertisement for Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) in Bangladesh. It details the role of the Programme Manager, the duration of the position (one year, renewable up to three years and six months), and lists the qualifications and experience required for the successful candidate. It also provides information on the application process, including the deadline for receiving applications (25 February 2010) and where to send the application form.