

India passes women quota bill

Indian MPs suspended over protest

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Indian Parliament, yesterday passed the historic women quota bill by overwhelming majority to reserve 33 per cent of seats in legislatures after Trinamool Congress, a key ally of ruling Congress party-led coalition, abstained from voting.

"It is a historic and giant step towards empowering women and a celebration of their rights," said Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shortly before the House passed the Bill by 186 votes in favour and one against.

The passage of the Bill in Rajya Sabha came a day after some angry legislators in the House, who opposed the legislation, rushed to the chairman's seat as he presided over the session, tore up copies of the bill and tried to grab his microphone.

The House suspended seven lawmakers, mostly belonging to Lulu Prasad-led Rashtriya Janata Dal and Mulayam Singh Yadav-headed Samajwadi Party, which strongly opposed the Bill, because of their behaviour on Tuesday when they had refused to leave the House.

Mulayam Singh Yadav said that a portion of the women's quota should be set aside for minorities and backward castes, which have been socially and economically disadvantaged as well.

However, main opposition parties, including Bharatiya Janata Party and Leftist groups, supported the legislation proposed by ruling Congress Party.

The bill would raise the number of female lawmakers in the 545-seat lower house to 181 from the current 59. It would nearly quadruple the number of women in the 250-seat upper house. The bill would also apply to state legislatures.



A Tibetan activist in exile scuffles with police officials during a protest outside the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi on Tuesday on the eve of anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day. China indicated Sunday it would take a hard line on the selection of a successor to the ageing Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama in rare comments on the sensitive issue.

Bomb kills 3 in Afghanistan

Police thwart Taliban suicide attack

AP, AFP, Kandahar/ Khost

A roadside bomb killed two Afghan border police and a civilian riding in their vehicle Tuesday in southern Afghanistan, police said, as Britain's defence secretary urged patience in the push to secure the volatile region.

The attack occurred in the south-eastern corner of Kandahar province near the Pakistan border, said Gen Abdul Raziq, the border police commander for the region. He said the police were headed with their passenger toward the town of Spin Boldak, but did not have further information.

Meanwhile, would-be Taliban suicide bombers dressed in burqas and armed with rifles tried to storm an Afghan government building yesterday but were killed in a shoot-out with police, officials said.

The thwarted attack took place in the city of Khost, part of Afghanistan's troubled eastern region bordering Pakistan.

Afghan security forces followed the pair of attackers clad in burqas to an abandoned government-owned building close to government offices, said General Mohammad Asrar, army general in the province.

"Police surrounded the house and shot both attackers -- one of them detonated explosives strapped to his body during the attack and wounded four policemen," Asrar told AFP.

An exchange of fire with security forces lasted for over two hours, said another army general, Mohammad Nawab.

The head of the provincial health directorate, Amir Badshah Rahmadzai Mangal, said the province's main hospital had received four wounded after the attack.

In neighbouring Helmand province the site of this month's massive offensive to clear militants from their haven in the town of Marjah British Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth urged both residents and troop-supplying nations to recognize that the military victory was the easy part.

BARADAR'S EXTRADITION

Karzai's visit in Pakistan to open deal

ANI, Islamabad

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai is likely to officially ask Islamabad to hand over Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Afghan Taliban's second-in command, to Kabul during his scheduled two-day visit to Pakistan starting Wednesday.

According to sources, Karzai would explore the possibilities of Baradar's extradition in an attempt to boost his sinking popularity over the war against Taliban, which many consider a lost cause.

It may be noted that the United States had also asked Pakistan to hand over Baradar to it, which was denied.

Malik had rejected the White House' request to hand over Baradar, who is considered second only to Taliban's supreme commander Mullah Omar, saying Pakistani agencies would first investigate his links with the banned terrorist network, and could hand him over to Afghanistan if the need arises but not to the US.

Lanka approves emergency ahead of election

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's outgoing parliament yesterday approved the extension of a state of emergency until after next month's legislative elections, giving sweeping powers to police and troops.

Parliament voted strongly to extend the laws enacted by President Mahinda Rajapakse earlier this month to deal with anti-government elements after the crushing of Tamil Tiger rebels almost a year ago.

"We are not going to use these emergency laws against the political opposition, but only to deal with the remnants of the Tigers," Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake told parliament.

The president can extend the emergency for one month at a time, but this must be ratified by

parliament within 10 days.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's defeated presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka ended a hunger strike after just one day when he was allowed to speak to his daughters, his party said yesterday.

Fonseka has been held at a detention centre since his arrest on February 8, two weeks after losing elections to President Mahinda Rajapakse.

The former army general began his fast Sunday but ended it Monday night.

Fresh parliamentary elections are due on April 8, before the expiry of the current extension of the emergency.

Sri Lanka has faced criticism over the use of emergency laws, which were first imposed in 1983 to combat Tamil Tiger separatists who waged a 37-year battle until last May, when they were wiped out by the army.

LAHORE ATTACK

Leaders blame 'foreign hands'

ANI, Islamabad

Continuing their old policy of blaming 'foreign powers' for terror attacks in the country, Pakistani leaders have once again pointed fingers toward involvement of foreign hands in Monday's suicide bombing at the office of the Special Intelligence Agency in Lahore in which at least 11 persons were killed.

Talking to media persons here, Interior Minister Rehman Malik blamed the Taliban for the attack, saying the banned extremist outfit was working as 'mercenaries' in Pakistan.

"Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been involved in all terror attacks in the country... they are hired killers and want to destabilise Pakistan," Malik said.

Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah went a step ahead and directly blamed India's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) for the suicide attack.

Myanmar junta to appoint electoral body

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military junta will pick all members of the country's new election commission, state media said yesterday as the regime revealed the first details of long-awaited laws for polls this year.

The government enacted five new laws on Monday ahead of elections by the generals promised later this year, which are expected in October or November although there is still no firm date.

The move adds to international concerns about the fairness of the elections -- Myanmar's first for 20 years -- which critics say are a sham designed to legitimise the junta's grip on power.

State-run newspapers on Tuesday published the full two-page text of the first of the laws, the "Union Election Commission Law", signed by junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe.

The law will "form a union election commission to supervise the practising of the Union of Myanmar people's rights to elect or stand for election as well as the political parties," the text said.

But it said that the military junta, officially known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), would itself appoint the commission, which will have at least five members.

All members must be over 50 and "shall be deemed by the SPDC to be an eminent person, to have integrity and experience, to be loyal to the state and its citizens and shall not be a member of a political party."

Pak drone raid 'kills 3 militants'

BBC ONLINE

Missiles fired by a US drone aircraft have killed at least three suspected militants in north-west Pakistan, security officials say.

The attack targeted a residential building inside the compound of a veterinary hospital in Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan.

The identities of those killed in the attack are not yet known.

Militants are often targeted by drones: there have been more than a dozen such strikes this year alone.

Locals say the attacks have destroyed many training camps and compounds. They have also killed dozens of local and foreign militants, officials say.



In this February 19, 2010 photograph, US citizen Brad Fister, 29, cradles his 23-day old daughter Ashton in Hyderabad. Commercial surrogacy is a booming industry in India where adoption laws are loosely regulated, and in recent years, the ranks of childless foreign couples are coming here because of this reason.

PHOTO: AFP

US denies Nato aircraft violating Pak airspace

ANI, Islamabad

The United States has rejected reports regarding Nato aircraft violating Pakistan's airspace over Baluchistan.

A statement issued by the US Embassy here, described media reports regarding Nato planes violating Pakistan's airspace in Baluchistan's Chaman area on Friday as 'entirely false'.

"No Nato aircraft flew over Chaman, as alleged in articles of several daily newspapers," The Daily Times quoted the statement, as saying.

It added that air operations being carried out by international forces and the US in Afghanistan along the Pakistan border were being closely coordinated with the Pakistan Air Force (PAF).

Putin to visit India this week

AFP, Moscow

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will travel to India this week for a two-day visit aimed at tightening economic and political ties with one of Moscow's oldest allies, the government said yesterday.

"A wide range of issues in the development of the strategic partnership between Russia and India are planned to be discussed," the government said in a statement ahead of the visit which starts Thursday.

Kabul bans dark tinted vehicle windows

AP, Kabul

Afghanistan's capital is cracking down on vehicles with dark tinted windows to increase security following a spate of terrorist attacks in Kabul.

Interior ministry spokesman Zemerli Bashary says the ban will take effect Thursday. Drivers who do not comply will have their vehicles impounded.

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