

Thai Yellow Shirts call for martial law

AFP, AP, Bangkok

Thailand's pro-establishment "Yellow Shirts" called yesterday for the imposition of martial law to end mass anti-government protests, warning they may act themselves unless the situation improves.

"The prime minister knows well that in this situation military measures are needed because it was hard to resolve it through politics," said Suriyasaai Katsasila, spokesman for the Yellow Shirts' New Politics Party.

"There should be an announcement of martial law." The Yellow Shirts, formally known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), have warned they will take actions to "protect the country" if authorities do not deal with thousands of anti-government "Red Shirts" massed in the capital.

A one-week deadline set by the Yellow Shirts on April 18 for the Reds to disperse expired with no end in sight to the standoff, which has twice descended into bloodshed this month, leaving 26 people dead and hundreds injured.

Suriyasaai called on PAD members across the country to start peaceful protests.

"If the situation does not improve, PAD will consider intensifying its measures," he said.

Meanwhile, "Red Shirt" protesters, wary of a possible crackdown, told their followers to ditch their signature crimson attire so they can go undercover as more bomb threats rattled the tense Thai capital Monday.

There was no violence in the central Bangkok shopping area where protesters remained camped for a 24th day, but an explosion injured eight people late Sunday near the home of former Prime Minister Banharn Silapa-archa, who is allied to the ruling coalition, police said.

A bomb disposal team rushed early Monday to the city's financial district amid reports of another explosive device at the edge of Silom Road, where five grenades last week left one person dead and more than 80 wounded. It was a false alarm.

Both sides in Thailand's protracted political crisis have dug in following a breakdown of negotiations and a televised appearance Sunday by the prime minister that offered no solution to the protracted crisis.



Red-Shirt protesters (background) watch while Thai explosive ordinance disposal experts search for a suspected hand grenade amidst used tyres inside their (Red Shirts') fortified camp next to Silom Road of central Bangkok yesterday. Eleven people, including three policemen, were injured in a grenade attack late on April 25 on the house of a former Thai prime minister in protest-hit Bangkok.

British envoy escapes blast in Yemen

AP, Sanaa

The British ambassador narrowly escaped what appeared to be a suicide attack on his armoured car while travelling to work yesterday morning, Yemeni officials said.

British Embassy spokeswoman Ambassador Mortimer said the Chantanel, Timothy Torlot, was unhurt, but the attack underlined the precarious security in Yemen. An impoverished Arab nation in the southern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen has in recent years become a haven for al-Qaeda militants taking advantage of the government's limited authority outside major cities and tribal control over the rest of the country.

The Yemeni officials said the vehicle was passing through a poor neighbourhood in the eastern part of Sanaa when an explosion went off nearby. They said they believed the attacker was wearing an explosives belt and that he was killed in the explosion.

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, but it bore the hallmarks of al-Qaeda.

Sarkozy under pressure on Pakistan deal

AFP, Paris

President Nicolas Sarkozy and his allies came under fresh pressure yesterday to respond to party funding allegations that have been linked to a Pakistani bomb attack that killed 11 French engineers.

Sarkozy was spokesman for former prime minister Edouard Balladur's 1995 presidential bid, at a time when the campaign is alleged to have taken kickbacks on a deal to sell submarines to the Pakistani navy.

Balladur lost the race and his victorious rival Jacques Chirac promptly cancelled a raft of commissions that were allegedly to have been paid to Pakistani officers. Sarkozy took over the presidency himself in 2007.

In May 2002 a bomb in Karachi killed 11 French naval engineers who were in Pakistan to build the submarines.

Robot vessels cap Louisiana oil leak

BBC ONLINE

Robotic submersibles are being used to try to stop a fast-flowing oil leak nearly a mile (1.5km) below the surface in the Gulf of Mexico.

Some 1,000 barrels (42,000 gallons) of oil a day are spewing from a damaged well, after a drilling rig exploded and sank off the Louisiana coast last week.

British oil company BP, which leased the rig, said the "first-of-its-kind" attempt would take 24 to 36 hours.

There are fears of an environmental disaster if the mission fails.

Conservation experts say the oil leak has the potential to damage beaches, barrier islands and wetlands across the coastline.

For now, the weather conditions are keeping the oil away from the coastline and it is hoped the waves will break up the heavy crude oil, allowing it to harden and sink back to the ocean floor.

Avoid contact with aliens: Hawking

AFP, London

Aliens may exist but mankind should avoid contact with them as the consequences could be devastating, British scientist Stephen Hawking warned Sunday.

"If aliens visit us, the outcome would be much as when Columbus landed in America, which didn't turn out well for the Native Americans," said the astrophysicist in a new television series, according to British media reports.

The programmes depict an imagined universe featuring alien life forms in huge spaceships on the hunt for resources after draining their own planet dry.

"Such advanced aliens would perhaps become nomads, looking to conquer and colonise whatever planets they can reach," warned Hawking.

Arizona protests immigration law

CNN ONLINE, Phoenix, Arizona

Hundreds of people gathered outside Arizona's Capitol building on Sunday in a largely peaceful protest against the state's tough new immigration law.

Chanting "Yes we can," waving American flags and holding signs reading "We have rights" and "We are human," demonstrators kept up a festive spirit as they denounced the bill signed Friday by Gov. Jan Brewer.

The new law requires police to determine whether a person is in the United States legally. It also requires immigrants to carry their alien registration documents at all times and requires police to question people if there is reason to suspect they're in the United States illegally.

Protesters worry that the law will foster racial profiling. "What is 'reasonable suspicion'?" protester Jose Acosta asked Sunday. "Are we going to get pulled over just because of a broken taillight or because of the colour of our skin? ... If so, is everybody going to be pulled over?"

Kearny Police Chief Joe Martinez called critics' concerns unfounded, saying the Arizona law enforcement community includes a large number of Hispanics.

"We've never had a policy of racial profiling," Martinez said Saturday night at a town hall meeting in Casa Grande. "In fact, quite the contrary, it's been outlawed."

Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon appeared at the rally in support of the protest, calling the law unconstitutional and "just plain wrong."

Israel freezes East Jerusalem construction

Forces kill Hamas man in West Bank

AP, AFP, Jerusalem/West Bank

Two Jerusalem officials say Israel has frozen plans for new construction in the city's disputed eastern sector despite Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's declarations to the contrary.

They say the decision was taken after Israel infuriated Washington last month by announcing a major new east Jerusalem construction project during a visit by US Vice President Joe Biden.

Palestinians claim that sector of the city as their future capital and say they won't resume peace talks with Israel until construction there stops.

One city councillor says top Jerusalem city hall officials told him Netanyahu's office verbally ordered a construction freeze. Another councillor says two committees that review construction plans on weekly basis have

barely met since Biden visited. Israeli forces on Monday killed a wanted Hamas operative who had holed up in a house in the southern West Bank, police and the army said.

A team comprised of border police, soldiers and members of the Shin Bet domestic intelligence, "eliminated Ali Suweiti," a border police spokesman said.

The army said the force surrounded the house in Beit Awwa where Suweiti had holed up and urged him to surrender. He refused "and opened fire at the forces" who returned fire, the army said in a statement.

"The terrorist continued to fire at the force, and was ultimately killed."

Villagers carried away the body. Suweiti, who was born in 1968, "was a member of a Hamas militant squad" and executed five shooting attacks and an explosive device attack between 1999 and

2004, the army said. In one of the attacks in April 2004 he killed a border policeman in the West Bank, it added.

Hamas, an armed Islamist group sworn to the destruction of Israel, has carried out scores of deadly attacks and is blacklisted as a terrorist organisation by Israel and the West.

The group, which rules the Gaza Strip, blamed Monday's operation on Israel and security forces loyal to the Western-backed Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, calling it the "repulsive fruit of security coordination."

"The assassination of this Qassam commander is a dangerous crime, which comes in the context of the occupation's determination to eliminate the forces of the resistance, and especially the Qassam Brigades in the West Bank," Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said, referring to the group's armed wing.

President Bashir wins Sudan polls

BBC ONLINE

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir has been declared the winner of this year's landmark elections, despite facing war crimes charges over Darfur.

The polls were one of the world's most complex ever and Sudan's first multi-party elections in 24 years.

Former rebel leader Salva Kiir has been confirmed in power in the semi-autonomous south in the first polls since the north-south war ended.

Observers and opposition parties have complained of fraud in north and south.

Tension was raised over the weekend, with reports of clashes along the north-south border.

Some 55 people were said to have been killed in clashes between an Arab community and southern soldiers.

The BBC's James Copnall in Khartoum says President Bashir's re-election could be interpreted as a popular rebuke for the International Criminal Court.

DELHI MEET Manmohan, Karzai vow to tackle militant threat

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Afghan President Hamid Karzai met in New Delhi yesterday and vowed to tackle the militant violence that threatens regional stability.

The talks came two months after nine Indians were killed in a suicide attack in Kabul that Indian officials blamed on Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

India is heavily involved in reconstruction and aid efforts in Afghanistan and has provided more than a billion dollars in assistance since the fall of the Islamist Taliban regime in 2001.

"We discussed the issue of terrorism, which threatens our region," Singh said. "President Karzai assured me that the government of Afghanistan will take all possible measures for the security of Indians in Afghanistan."

Officials in New Delhi say groups such as the LeT have the tacit support of Pakistan's military and have accused the

militants of mounting attacks against Indians in Kabul as part of a south Asian "proxy war."

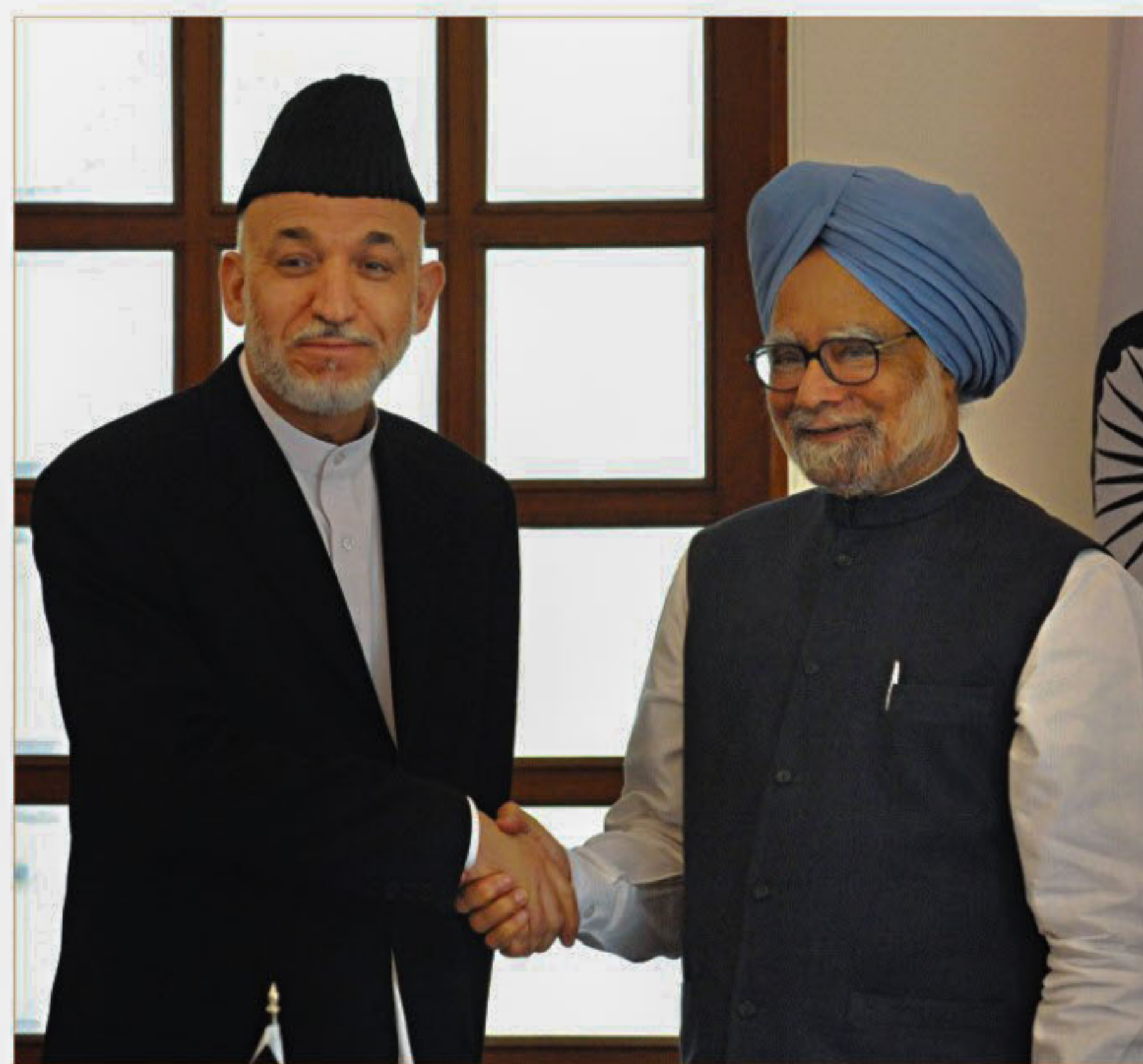
Without mentioning Pakistan by name, Singh said the attacks in Kabul in February "were the handiwork of those who do not wish to see the emergence of a strong, independent and pluralistic Afghanistan."

He stressed that the attacks would not undermine India's commitment to the country.

India is also increasingly concerned over plans to open talks with "moderate" Taliban -- a policy being pushed by many within the international coalition engaged in Afghanistan.

Karzai, en route to a meeting of South Asian leaders in Bhutan starting Wednesday, said the two leaders had talked about the "peace jirga" planned in late May to bring together all of Afghanistan's tribal leaders.

He said the jirga would give advice on how to reconcile those Taliban and other militants "who are not part of al-Qaeda, who are not part of any terrorist network."



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (L) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. The talks came two months after nine Indians were killed in a suicide attack in Kabul that Indian officials blamed on Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).



Iraqi university students attend a costume party ahead of their official graduation ceremony from the Al-Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad on April 26, 2010.

PHOTO: AFP

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