

Nepal Maoists defy govt, force shutdown

Gilani to send sweets to Manmohan

AFP, Kathmandu
Maoist former rebels patrolled the streets of Nepal's capital Kathmandu yesterday, enforcing a shutdown in a show of strength intended to pressure the government to step down.

The Maoist party, which has the largest number of seats in parliament, is demanding the replacement of the ruling coalition by a Maoist-led national administration.

All shops were closed and vehicles were kept off the roads by groups of opposition supporters carrying sticks and chanting revolutionary slogans.

"The whole country is shut down. No institutions or industries are operating and there is no traffic," senior police official Bigyan Raj Sharma told AFP.

government on our own. We want a national unity government led by us," Maoist member of parliament Jhaku Subedi told AFP.

In a televised address late Saturday, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal refused to resign and appealed for further talks, stressing that an "all-party consensus is the only alternative that will pave the way forward".

"Shutting down the nation is not the way to find a solution to this impasse," he said.

But Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who led the rebels during the decade of fighting in which at least 16,000 people were killed, told protesters that the strike would last until the government was forced from office.

Dahal, whose nom-de-guerre is Prachanda, was prime minister until May last year when his Maoist-led government fell after the president overruled its decision to sack the head of the army.

Saturday's demonstration was peaceful despite fears of clashes between the opposition's aggressive youth wing and the security forces. Police said the crowd totalled about 150,000 -- much lower than Maoist estimates of 600,000.



Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) supporters chant slogans during an indefinite nationwide general strike by Maoist aimed at toppling the coalition government in Kathmandu yesterday. They are demanding that the current government to resign and replace it with a national government under a Maoist-led administration.

ANI, Islamabad

The 50-minute talk between Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of the XVth South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) summit in Thimpu may have done more than just clearing the air between both nations...

In an informal conversation with reporters on his special aircraft en route to Islamabad from Thimpu, Gilani recalled his meeting with 'pleasant and down-to-earth' Dr. Singh.

Gilani said during their conversation, the Indian leader shared his school days' memories with him of his village home in Gah, in Chakwal District of Punjab province.

Pak troops kill 10 insurgents

AP, Parachinar

A Pakistani government official says army helicopter gun ships pounded insurgent hideouts in northwest Pakistan, killing at least 10 militants.

Samiullah Khan said the hideouts hit yesterday are in the Dabori area of the Orakzai tribal region near the Afghan border.

Independent confirmation of the casualties and the identities of those killed is virtually impossible because the region is remote and dangerous and media access there is restricted.

New Delhi on high alert as embassies warn of attack

AFP, New Delhi

Thousands of police and paramilitary soldiers guarded New Delhi's markets and shopping centres yesterday after foreign embassies in India issued warnings of imminent militant attacks.

The US, British, Australian and other Western embassies issued urgent alerts advising their nationals to avoid busy parts of the city, where blasts in upmarket shopping areas in 2008 killed 22 people.

Commandos and armoured cars guarded metro stations, shopping malls and crowded market places across the sprawling city of 16 million people.

Police with automatic weapons patrolled Delhi's four most popular shopping districts,

and explosives experts used tracker dogs to sweep sensitive areas.

New Delhi police spokesman Rajan Bhagat urged residents to inform the police of "any suspicious object, person or vehicle".

Canada and New Zealand were among the countries warning citizens to take precautions in New Delhi, a rapidly expanding and chaotic city that wants to host its international image before hosting October's Commonwealth Games.

The US embassy posted an advisory on its website on Saturday warning: "There are increased indications that terrorists are planning imminent attacks in New Delhi."

It named popular city centre shopping zones such as Connaught Place as "especially attractive targets for terrorist groups".

Major edn reforms bills in LS today

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Government's initiatives on higher education reforms will be put on fast track as four bills, including one on allowing entry of foreign universities to the country, are expected to be introduced tomorrow in Lok Sabha.

The other bills relate to checking of malpractices by educational institutions, setting up of a national accreditation agency and having specialised educational tribunals to adjudicate disputes in campuses.

According to the list of business slated for Monday, HRD Minister Kapil Sibal is expected to move the four bills.

Madhuri sent to 14-day judicial custody

ANI, New Delhi

A Delhi Court on Saturday sent Diplomat Madhuri Gupta, accused of spying for Pakistan, to 14 days judicial custody.

Gupta, a Grade B Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer working as a Second Secretary, was arrested on April 23 by the Delhi Police.

Gupta was produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Kaveri Baweja after the end of her police custody.

Delhi Police Special Cell sought two days further custodial interrogation of the accused which was refused by the court.

"Madhuri Gupta is sent to judicial custody till May 15," said Joglekar Dahiya, Gupta's counsel.

She was accused of passing on vital information to Pakistani intelligence agencies.

Intelligence agencies also quizzed a couple in Jammu and Kashmir who denied any links with the spy.

On Friday, Gupta named Mubassar Rana and Jamshed as her Pakistan handlers-both are reportedly Inter Service Intelligence (IS) agents.

Indian state minister resigns over rape charges

ANI, Bangalore

Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Minister Hartalu Hallappa, who is facing charges of raping a friend's wife, resigned from his post yesterday, NDTV reported.

A report of the alleged incident was flashed as a banner headline in the front page of a leading Kannada daily (Vijaya Karnataka) yesterday.

It was reported that an influential minister in the BS Yeddyappa-led Government had attempted to sexually molest the wife of his close friend at the latter's house in Shimoga recently.



Afghan protesters shout slogans against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during a demonstration in front of the Iranian embassy compound in Kabul yesterday as they accused the Iranian government of a public execution of 40 Afghans two weeks ago.

PHOTO: AFP

BJP lets Soren remain CM for now

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

The BJP on Saturday agreed to pleas made by JMM leaders and let Shibu Soren continue as Chief Minister of Jharkhand for some more time, putting on hold a decision on the transfer of power for now.

After a marathon meeting of BJP leaders Nitin Gadkari, former president Rajnath Singh and party general secretary Ananth Kumar, with Soren's son Hemant and other JMM leaders as well as allies like JD(U) and AJSU, it was decided that the "consultation process, amongst the allies, would continue".

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PHONE TAPPING ALLEGATIONS Indian govt may order inquiry

ANI, New Delhi

The Union Government is likely to order a full-fledged inquiry into recent allegations of phone tapping of senior politicians.

Sources said the National Technical Research Organization (NTRO), alleged to have intercepted phone calls, was not authorized by the Government to conduct such observations.

They added that the Government would investigate whether an agency other than the NTRO may also be included.

Eight police forces, apart from Central agencies have access to phone-tapping equipments.

The NTRO came under severe criticism after a section of media revealed phone tapping by this agency.

The NTRO is government's technical intelligence gathering agency, reports to the National Security Advisor (NSA).

Earlier in the week, Union Home Minister P Chidambaram said he had discussed the matter with Prim Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and the Government would bring the NTRO under a ministry.

Where to buy a land mine in Lanka!

PUBLIC ONLINE

The civil war in Sri Lanka may be over, but you can buy a land mine on the side of the road in Jaffna though they're more likely to explode in your mouth than anywhere else.

In the main city on Sri Lanka's northernmost peninsula, besieged by 2 1/2 decades of bloody sectarian violence until last May, the spicy samosa sold by street vendors throughout the city is still known by its nom de guerre: midi-vedi, the Tamil word for land mine.

The name was first used by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, popularly known as the Tamil Tigers, in the early 1990s when they were in control of Jaffna. The moniker has stuck, and the delicacy is a hit among the tens of thousands of visitors who have begun to stream into the peninsula since it opened to public traffic in January.

Most of the tourists are from the majority Sinhala community living in the south of the island, curious to visit a place that has been cut off from most of the nation for nearly 25 years.

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