

Clashes in Nepal as frustration grows

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist protesters clashed with residents in the Nepalese capital Kathmandu yesterday as anger grew over a strike that has shut down much of the country for five days.

The Maoist party, which has the largest number of seats in parliament, is enforcing the general strike in an attempt to force the ruling coalition from office in a tactic that threatens to derail Nepal's fragile peace process.

"There have been some minor clashes between anti-Maoist demonstrators and Maoists," police spokesman Bigyan Raj Sharma told AFP on Thursday. "Police resorted to minimum use of force to bring the situation under control."

Furious locals in Budanilkantha, in the north of the city, tried to defy the Maoists, who have ordered all private and commercial vehicles off the streets and for all shops, offices and businesses to remain closed.

Police said they used tear gas to break up the fighting as Maoist supporters beat up locals frustrated at the shutdown.

The National Human Rights Commission, an autonomous official body, expressed concern over the increasing problems facing the public as talks between Maoists and the gov-

ernment failed to make progress.

"Medical care has been badly affected. We have had reports of patients being transported back to their homes in wheelchairs," commission spokesman Gauri Pradhan told AFP.

"Pregnant women have difficulty getting to hospital. Remote areas are facing acute shortage of essential drugs because transport is affected," she said.

Many hospitals have only kept their emergency wards open as doctors struggle to get to work.

"Two doctors are working 24 hours and a few nurses are working double shifts," Philip Shyam Ranjit, a doctor at B&B Hospital's emergency department, told AFP. "A lot of people have no access to medical attention."

The Maoists have launched their challenge to the government -- a loose coalition of 20 parties -- ahead of May 28 by when a new national constitution should have been drafted.

But lawmakers are expected to miss the deadline, leading to a possible political crisis.

Maoist guerrillas fought a bloody insurgency against the state for 10 years before a peace agreement was signed in 2006, and the left-wing rebels then won elections in 2008 before falling from power last year.



Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) supporters hit a local (C) sitting on a motorcycle with sticks during the fifth day of indefinite strike in Budanilkantha on the outskirts of Kathmandu yesterday. Maoist protesters clashed with residents in the Nepalese capital as anger grew over a strike that has shut down much of the country for five days.

Indian police fire on Naga protesters

BBC ONLINE

Police have opened fire on a group of Naga tribes people on the border between India's north-eastern states of Manipur and Nagaland, officials said.

Police said 15 protesters had been injured, mostly during a stampede.

A group representing the Nagas alleged that at least two Nagas had been killed in the police firing.

The Nagas are angry that the Manipur government has barred Naga separatist rebel leader Thuingaleng Muivah from entering the state.

Mr Muivah, the general secretary of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), is waiting at the village of Viswema near Nagaland's capital, Kohima, with a convoy of NSCN leaders and activists hoping to travel to his village in Manipur.

The Manipur government has sought to stop Mr Muivah's visit to Manipur because it fears the visit may inflame Naga passions as the separatist rebel leader is scheduled to address several rallies in Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur.

The firing happened at Mao town, where Naga tribespeople had collected.

One baby with syphilis born every hour in China

Reveals Study

AFP, Hong Kong

One child was born with syphilis every hour in China in 2008, researchers said yesterday, as new money from the country's growing economy fuels the world's fastest-growing epidemic of the disease.

Syphilis was almost wiped out in China 50 years ago, but it is now the most commonly reported sexually transmitted disease in Shanghai, according to an article in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM).

Female sex workers and homosexual men are driving the infection rate, the researchers said, and there is evidence that social pressures are discouraging people from seeking treatment at official clinics.

"After China's economy became increasingly market-based in the 1980s, the growing numbers of Chinese businessmen with money and young women without money translated into expanded demand and supply.

NY car bomb suspect did a dry run

AP, New York

Days before the failed car bomb in Times Square, a Pakistani-American scouted the bustling district in the same vehicle and then, on a second trip, left a getaway car blocks from his chosen target, a law enforcement official has told The Associated Press.

Faisal Shahzad, now in custody on terrorism and weapons charges, drove a 1993 Nissan Pathfinder to Times Square from Connecticut on April 28, apparently to figure out where would be the best place to leave it later, the official said Wednesday. He then returned April 30 to drop off a black Isuzu, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the investigation.

The official said Shahzad went back Saturday and left the SUV loaded with firecrackers, gasoline and propane, enough to likely create a fireball and kill nearby tourists and Broadway theatregoers had it gone off successfully.

Shahzad, 30, a Pakistani-American from Connecticut, admitted to rigging the Pathfinder with a crude bomb based on explosives training he received in Pakistan, authorities say. He was pulled off a Dubai-bound plane Monday and has been cooperating with investigators. For a second day Wednesday, he had yet to



appear in Manhattan federal court.

Kiyat Ali, a cousin of Shahzad's father, has called the arrest "a conspiracy."

Shahzad is believed to have been working alone when he began preparing the attack, almost immediately after returning in February from his native land, authorities said. They said they have yet to find a wider link to extremist groups or to pin down a motive.

"It appears from some of his other activities that March is when he decided to put this plan in motion," New York police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said Wednesday. "He came back from Pakistan Feb 3, 2010. It may well have been an indicator of putting something catastrophic in motion."

In leaving Times Square on Saturday, he discovered he left a chain of 20 keys including those to the getaway car and his

home in Connecticut in the SUV, and had to take public transit, the official told the AP.

Investigators had already started searching for suspects, when he returned to the scene on Sunday with a second set of keys to pick up the Isuzu, parked about eight blocks from the car bomb site, the official said.

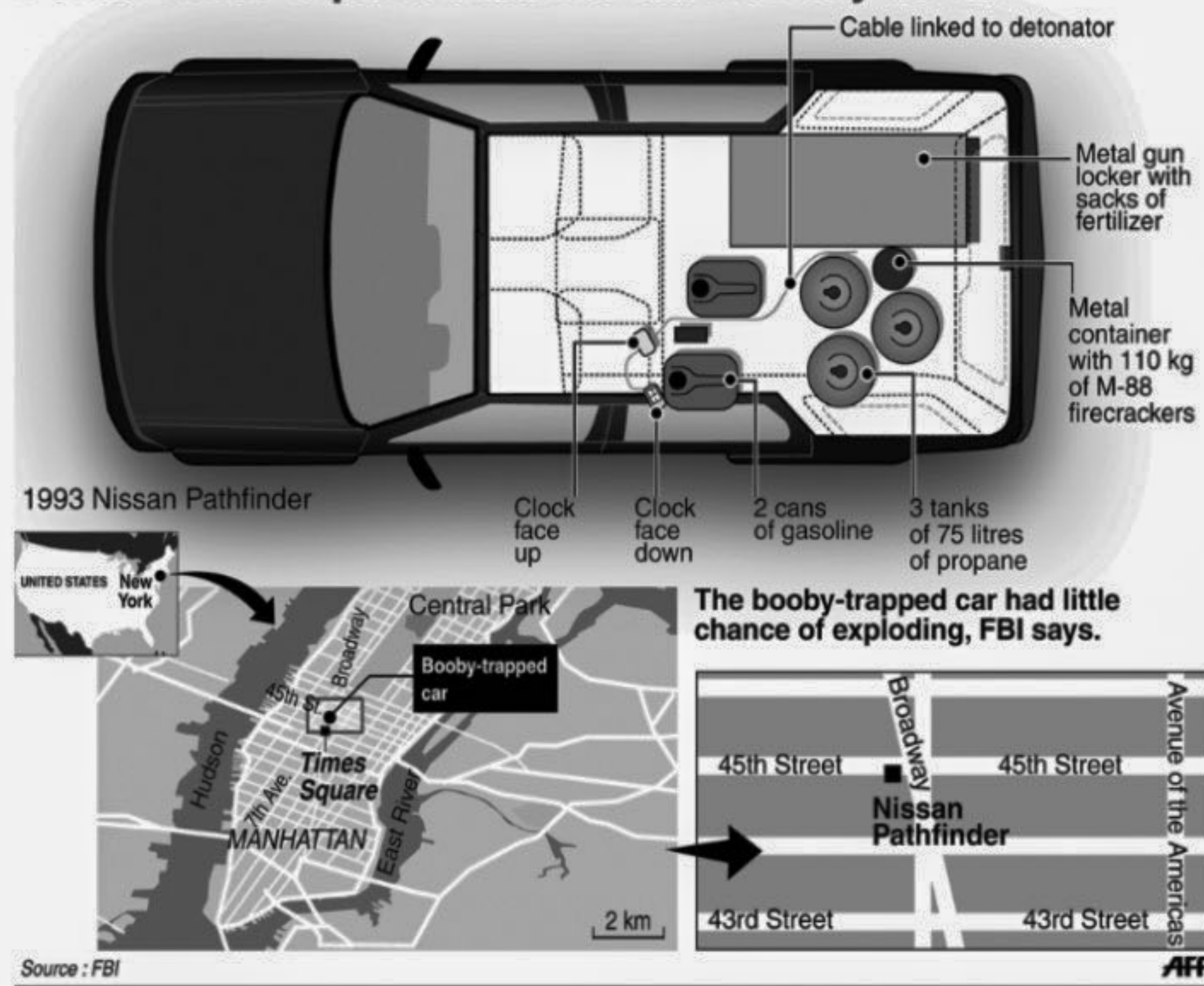
Kelly told a Senate panel that Shahzad bought a gun in March that was found in his Isuzu at Kennedy Airport, suggesting that he was moving ahead on the bombing plot shortly after returning from Pakistan.

Pakistan Ambassador Husain Haqqani said Wednesday that an investigation into Shahzad's links to Pakistan was ongoing. He said an unspecified number of people had been questioned but no one has been arrested or detained in Pakistan. Haqqani spoke to the AP prior to an appearance at Harvard University in Massachusetts.

Asked if any connection had emerged between Shahzad and Qari Hussain Mehsud, the Pakistani Taliban's chief bomb maker who is also in charge of recruiting suicide bombers, Haqqani said "no such fact had emerged," at this point in the investigation.

"I think it's premature to start identifying groups and individuals with whom he might have trained," he said.

Foiled Times Square attack: a rudimentary bomb



Thai PM offers to dissolve Parliament in September

AP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister said yesterday he would dissolve Parliament in September meeting a key demand of anti-government protesters but only if they end their crippling occupation of Bangkok's commercial district.

Following the unveiling of a roadmap to reconciliation Monday, protest leaders demanded Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva specify a date for Parliament's dissolution before they pulled out of their barricaded encampment in the heart of the Thai capital.

The political haggling has prolonged Thailand's nearly two-month-long crisis that has paralysed vital areas of Bangkok, hammered the economy and ground government machinery to a near-halt. Clashes with soldiers and other violence have killed 27 people and injured nearly 1,000.

"If they don't go home, I'm not going to dissolve Parliament," Abhisit said in a live interview on ASTV. Other Thai media quoted Abhisit as saying the dissolution could take place Sept. 15 to 30.

"I repeat, I am not negotiating with anybody," Abhisit said in the interview, adding he was inviting everyone into a reconciliation process, "including the protesters."

Meanwhile, Red Shirt protest leaders demanded the opposite scenario.

"It's impossible for protesters to disperse before the government announces the Parliament dissolution," said Nattawut Saikua, a protest leader. "A mutual agreement needs to be reached first."

Abhisit noted the protest leaders earlier welcomed his reconciliation plan, which includes an offer of new elections on Nov. 14 about a year before Abhisit's term would end if the Red Shirts stop their demonstrations.

The timing of the dissolution has been a crucial issue, and the Red Shirts rejected Abhisit's earlier offer to dissolve Parliament by the end of the year. Abhisit has said he wants enough time in office to pass a national budget for next year.

But both sides want to be in control when a key reshuffle of top military posts occurs in September.

IAEA seeks ideas to get Israel to sign NPT

AFP, Vienna

UN atomic watchdog chief Yukiya Amano is asking IAEA member states for ideas on how to persuade Israel to sign up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), according to a document seen by AFP yesterday.

In a letter, dated April 7 and circulated to the foreign ministers of members states of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Amano asked ministers to "inform me of any views that your government might have" on the issue.

At the IAEA's last general conference in September 2009, member countries passed a resolution entitled "Israeli nuclear capabilities" which called on the Jewish state "to accede to the NPT and place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards."

Israel is widely considered to be the Middle East's sole if undeclared nuclear power and is not a signatory to the NPT.

The symbolic, non-binding resolution -- which had been tabled by Arab states -- was passed, after some controversial debate, with a total of 49 countries in favour, 45 against and 16 abstentions.

And although it was only a non-binding resolution, it urged the IAEA's director general "to work with the concerned states towards achieving that end."

And it requested the director general "to report on the implementation of this resolution" to the agency's board of governors and the upcoming general conference in September.

Fonseka vows to expose war crimes

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's ex-army chief yesterday vowed to "expose" any war crimes committed at the end of the country's civil war, raising pressure on the government, which has resisted calls for a probe.

The United Nations estimated that 7,000 civilians perished in fighting in the early months of last year when government troops overwhelmed Tamil Tiger rebels and ended their 37-year separatist campaign.

General Sarath Fonseka, who fell out with President Mahinda Rajapakse and quit after successfully crushing the Tamil rebels, said there were allegations that should be thoroughly and independently investigated.

"I will go out of my way to expose anyone who has committed war crimes," Fonseka told reporters. "I will not protect anyone, from the very top to the bottom."

Fonseka, who was taken into military custody in February, spoke with reporters inside parliament after being escorted to attend Thursday's session as an opposition MP. He

won a seat at April parliamentary polls.

Fonseka said the government was afraid that he would expose anyone found guilty of rights abuses and was "hell bent" on silencing him.

"It is not patriotic to protect anyone who has caused injustices to Tamil youth," Fonseka said, adding that he himself was not personally aware of any instances of abuses but wanted all charges investigated.

Even as he spoke, the president announced plans to review the final phase of the battle against Tamil Tiger rebels, but stopped short of calling it a war crimes probe.

The president in a statement said he would appoint a commission to assess the lessons from the last stages of fighting and recommend measures to prevent a return to conflict.

"In assessing the lessons learnt from the recent conflict phase there will be the search for any violations of internationally accepted norms of conduct in such conflict situations, and the circumstances that may have led to such actions, and identify any persons or groups responsible for such acts."

Japan PM's family grave vandalised

AFP, Tokyo

The family grave of Japan's under-fire Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama was sprayed with yellow paint, police said yesterday, in what is believed was a protest against his US airbase policy U-turn.

The gravestone of his grandfather, former prime minister Ichiro Hatoyama, and grandmother was found vandalised early Thursday morning, police said.

Hatoyama visited the family plot in the public Yanaka Cemetery in downtown Tokyo on Thursday to check the damage and pray for his ancestors, local media reported.



UK soldiers walk at a base in Kandahar yesterday. Two British soldiers from the same regiment were killed in southern Afghanistan on May 3 in separate incidents, one in an explosion and the second in a traffic accident, defence officials said, bringing the British military death toll in Afghanistan to 284 since operations began there in 2001.

Karzai urges closer military coordination

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai called yesterday for US-led foreign troops to coordinate more closely with the Afghan military on operations, just days ahead of a key trip to Washington.

Karzai, who will next week hold talks with US President Barack Obama in the wake of a damaging row between the two leaders, told his security chiefs closer coordination was vital in the struggle against a worsening Taliban insurgency.

"The president emphasised the importance of coordination between Afghan and international forces," Karzai's office said in a statement.

"The president said the proposals already presented to the international com-

munity by the Afghan government on reform of security and operational strategies... would make the struggle against terrorism more effective."

The Western-backed leader has repeatedly called for the 130,000 US-led international forces fighting in Afghanistan to coordinate their military activities with Afghan soldiers to avoid civilian casualties.

Civilians are often caught up in the conflict, and Karzai argues that the focus of military operations against the Taliban should switch from villages in Afghanistan to militant hubs in neighbouring Pakistan.

The timing of his latest statement will be seen as significant, coming three days before he is due to fly to Washington for crucial talks ahead of a planned military push in Kandahar -- the heartland of the Taliban insurgency.

Kaczynski twin makes first campaign appearance

AFP, Warsaw

Jaroslav Kaczynski, the leader of Poland's conservative opposition and twin of late president Lech Kaczynski, yesterday made his first campaign appearance before the nation's snap presidential vote.

Wearing a black suit and black tie -- a tradition in Poland for relatives in mourning -- but smiling and looking dynamic, Kaczynski publicly thanked the 1.65 million Poles who endorsed his bid to run in the June 20 ballot.

The number far exceeded the 100,000 threshold required by law.