

Nepal's leaders battle to avert political crisis

Nepal's main party leaders were locked in talks yesterday to try and avert a political crisis with parliament's term due to expire at midnight, leaving the country without a functioning legislature.

The parliament, or Constituent Assembly, was elected two years ago to write a new constitution for the young republic, paving the way for fresh polls and turning the page on a decade of civil war between Maoist rebels and the state.

But it has singularly failed to do so and if the three main parties cannot agree to extend its term this time, it will be dissolved, plunging the country into political uncertainty.

Thousands of people gathered outside the parliament building in Nepal's capital Kathmandu and chanted slogans demanding the resignation of the prime minister and the extension of parliament.

"I fear for this country's future if the CA is dissolved," said unemployed 31-year-old Ajay Shivakoti. "The political parties should put self-interest aside and act in the interests of the country."

The Maoist party won elections in 2008 and took power for nine months, abolishing the 240-year-old Hindu monarchy and turning the country into a secular republic.

But it has sat in opposition for the past year and is refusing to vote for a bill extending the CA's term unless the prime minister resigns.

Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known as Prachanda, has pushed the leaders of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (UML) and Nepali Congress to accept his demands for a new power-sharing government.

But the other parties are refusing to buckle, resulting in the current deadlock and prompting a call from UN chief Ban Ki-moon for the leaders to work out their differences.

Newspapers in Nepal warned that a failure to find a solution could mean a return to a civil war in which at least 16,000 people died.

"There is a strong possibility that this day could become the worst in our history," said the Nepalese-language daily Naya Patrika in an editorial Friday.

"If the Constituent Assembly is dissolved, it will be an open invitation to civil war."



Nepalese police stand guard outside Nepal's Constitutional Assembly during a protest in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal teetered on the brink of political chaos, with parliament's term set to expire and rival party leaders unable to agree on an extension.

The leaders of the three parties reopened talks yesterday after consulting their members, but there was no immediate indication that either side was ready to compromise.

UML chairman Jhalanath Khanal pledged to "keep all options open to make sure that the sovereignty of the people is protected."

Baburam Bhattarai, regarded as one of the more moderate Maoist leaders, told AFP an extension of the assembly's term would be meaningless without an agreement on other key issues.

"Without consensus, there is no guarantee that the constitution would be written," he added.

The Maoists formed a government after the 2008 polls, but Prachanda resigned as prime minister a year later in a disagreement with the head of the army over the integration of former Maoist fighters into the national army.

The Maoists have been agitating for a return to government ever since and earlier this month brought the country to a standstill by holding a nationwide general strike to press their demands.

The strike was called off after six days following intense international pressure and a mass rally in the capital Kathmandu protesting against the disruption of schools and businesses.

Almost 24,000 members of the Maoists' army were confined to camps around the country after the end of the civil war in late 2006.

Around 4,000 were formally discharged this year after UN checks found they did not qualify as soldiers, and several thousand more are thought to have drifted away from the camps and returned home in the intervening years.

But more than 15,000 are estimated to remain, and their fate is a key stumbling block in the peace process.

Pigeon held in India on suspicion of spying for Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police are holding a pigeon under armed guard after it was caught on an alleged spying mission for arch rivals and neighbours Pakistan, media reported yesterday.

The white-coloured bird was found by a local resident in India's Punjab state, which borders Pakistan, and taken to a police station 40 kilometres (25 miles) from the capital Amritsar.

The pigeon had a ring around its foot and a Pakistani phone number and address stamped on its body in red ink.

Police officer Ramdas Jagjit Singh Chahal told the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency that they suspected the pigeon may have landed on Indian soil from Pakistan with a message, although no trace of a note has been found.

Officials have directed that no-one should be allowed to visit the pigeon, which police say may have been on a "special mission of spying".

The bird has been medically examined and was being kept in an air-conditioned room under police guard.

Senior officers have asked to be kept updated on the situation three times a day, PTI said.

Chahal said local pigeon fanciers in the sensitive border area had told police that Pakistani pigeons were easily identifiable, as they look different from Indian ones, according to the Indian Express newspaper.

Uncertain future awaits Pakistanis in face of constitutional crises

ANI, Islamabad

The ongoing tussle between the Pakistan Supreme Court and the federal government is likely to add to the feeling of uncertainty prevailing in the country in coming months as both key institutions are on the collision course over constitutional issues.

"I see June and July as the most crucial months for our country's future. June may pass off peacefully amid court hearings, but July can even bring change in the government. It all depends on the government, whether they implement the Supreme Court's decisions or not, if they don't, the uncertainty will increase, and, they may have to leave offices," said Akram Sheikh, one of country's top lawyers, who is himself appearing in many Supreme Court-related cases.

Pakistan's Supreme Court is hearing cases against President Asif Ali Zardari and his comrades. The main bone of contention is a Supreme Court's decision about declaring illegal an ordinance that benefited Zardari. The government is reluctant to implement it.

Zardari was able to become the country's president because of a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) issued by former military ruler Pervez Musharraf in 2007, which cleared him (Zardari) of corruption charges.

The then government wrote to the Government of Switzerland, where courts were probing Zardari's assets in Swiss banks, to close all cases against him following the NRO, which shielded more than 8,000 other accused from corruption-related cases.

But Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary, who was reinstated in March last year after a country-wide public movement, declared this ordinance illegal last December and ordered the government to write to the Swiss authorities to reopen the cases.

But the government is yet to implement this order and continues to make excuses. This has forced the Supreme Court to issue a fortnight-long deadline to the government to submit a detailed report on the implementation of court directives.

"If the government does not implement the Supreme Court orders, it will create havoc. The Supreme Court is in no mood to leave the government to go with it. It is a matter of the Supreme Court's honourable existence, they will declare the government disqualified in case of non-cooperation," said Sheikh, who is widely regarded as an expert on legal conflicts.

Afghan forces battle militants near eastern border

AP, Kabul

Afghan forces battled militants in a remote region near the Pakistan border for a sixth day yesterday, and officials were trying to confirm reports that a key Pakistani Taliban leader was killed in the fighting.

The combat in eastern Afghanistan came as the US military suffered its 1,000th death in the nearly 9-year-old Afghan war, according to an Associated Press count.

Hundreds of militants have been trying since Sunday to seize control of the Barg-e-Matal district of Nuristan province along the Pakistani border, provincial officials said. Villagers who took part in the fighting said they had killed Taliban commander Maulana Fazlullah along with six of his fighters during a strong insurgent attack Wednesday, said Gen Mohammad Zaman Momoza, commander for Afghan border police in eastern Afghanistan.

They still had no confirmation that Fazlullah was dead.

Fazlullah was a Pakistani Taliban leader who spearheaded the takeover of Pakistan's Swat Valley three years ago, gaining prominence as the "Radio Mullah" for his vehemently anti-Western sermons on local radio.

Sri Lanka president rejects foreign war crimes probe

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse has rejected international calls for a war crimes probe into the final offensive against Tamil Tiger rebels last year.

In an interview with the Al-Jazeera television news network on Thursday, Rajapakse said he would not tolerate any outside review of a campaign that he insisted was solely aimed at "defeating terrorism".

"I don't want my internal matters to be inquired by any other country or any other NGOs. We will look after that," Rajapakse said.

A transcript of the interview was released by the president's office yesterday.

Rajapakse stressed that security forces had not targeted Tamil civilians and insisted that no non-combatants were killed. He added, however, that he was prepared to punish anyone found guilty of excesses.

Government forces defeated the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LITE) by wiping out its top leadership on May 18 last year, ending a 37-year-old separatist struggle.

Centre for Advanced Research In Physical, Chemical, Biological and Pharmaceutical Sciences University of Dhaka Dhaka 1000 Invitation for International Tender Date: 26-05-2010 Ref No. SE/RB/06/09-10

Dhaka Power Distribution Co. Ltd. (An Enterprise of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh) Biddut Bhabon (2nd Floor), 1 Abdul Gani Road, Dhaka - 1000. Invitation for Local Tender

ELECTRICITY GENERATION COMPANY OF BANGLADESH LIMITED (An Enterprise of Bangladesh Power Development Board) Invitation for Re-Tenders

বাংলাদেশ বিজ্ঞান ও শিল্প গবেষণা পরিষদ (বিসিএসআইআর) Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) দ্বিতীয় কারণ দর্শানো নোটিশ