

Nepal tries to break political deadlock

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's parliament yesterday approved a change in the rules for electing a new leader in an effort to break a deadlock that has left the country without a government for almost seven months.

Under the new rules, no lawmaker will be allowed to abstain, attendance will be mandatory, and the house speaker will be able to disqualify candidates after three failed rounds of voting. "The amendment to the rules has paved the way for an end to the deadlock and eased the election process," lawmaker Ekraj Bhandari, the coordinator of the parliamentary committee told AFP.

"I hope this will help to end the impasse, but the onus is on the political parties to forge consensus."



Supporters of the Future Movement cheer as they walk past the torched vehicle belonging to the Arabic language Al-Jazeera satellite television station during a demonstration in support of the caretaker prime minister Saad Hariri in the Sunni bastion coastal city of Tripoli north of Beirut yesterday, as hundreds of people converged on Tripoli to take part in a 'day of rage' over the appointment of Hezbollah-backed tycoon Najib Mikati as prime minister.

Hezbollah-backed Mikati appointed Lebanon PM

Hariri denounces violence by supporters

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese President Michel Sleiman issued a decree yesterday appointing Hezbollah-backed candidate Najib Mikati as prime minister-designate pending the formation of a new government.

"The president informed me of the outcome of his consultations with parliamentarians, which have resulted in my appointment as prime minister," MP Mikati told reporters outside Sleiman's office. "I will cooperate fully with all Lebanese to form a new government that protects their unity and sovereignty," he added.

Mikati, 55, received the backing of 68 of parliament's 128 MPs, who had been meeting with Sleiman since Monday after Hezbollah brought down the unity government of Saudi- and Western-backed Saad Hariri on January 12.

The remaining 60 MPs backed Hariri for another term. Outgoing Lebanese premier Saad Hariri denounced on Tuesday violent incidents

that erupted during protests by his supporters against the appointment of a Hezbollah-backed candidate to head the new government.

Demonstrators in Sunni Muslim stronghold Tripoli attacked and burned a car of Al-Jazeera television, and ransacked the office of a rival MP.

"But it is also my duty to express my total rejection of all forms of rioting and acts of law-breakers who have accompanied these demonstrations."

"I deeply regret the attack against the vehicle of Al-Jazeera," he said.

Mikati's appointment has sparked widespread anger within the Sunni community. They view it as a bid by the Iranian- and Syrian-backed Hezbollah to sideline Hariri, the most popular Sunni leader, and even take control of the government.

According to Lebanon's complex power-sharing system, the premier must be a Sunni Muslim.

Yellow Shirts stage new Thai protest

BANGKOK

Around 2,000 nationalist Thai 'Yellow Shirts' rallied in Bangkok yesterday to demonstrate against the government's handling of a border territory dispute with neighbouring Cambodia.

The latest round of the kingdom's street protests came two days after a large rally by the rival 'Red Shirts', and a day after the arrest of five men with explosives, following a tip-off to police about potential bomb attacks.

A 3,000-strong security force was on hand at yesterday's gathering near Government House, where the Yellows accused Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of failing to defend long-disputed territory from Cambodia.

"We have made our suggestions to the government but they have failed to act, so we have no other choice," a leading Yellow protester, Chamlong Srimuang, told reporters at the rally site.

The 'Red Shirts' arranged a massive demonstration two days ago in protest of the current political scenario of Thailand.

The border issue has heated up since seven Thais were arrested in Cambodia in December for illegal entry and trespassing in the disputed zone, including a Yellow activist who remains in jail in Cambodia, also facing spying charges.

The Yellows, officially known as the People's Alliance for Democracy, used to be closely linked to Abhisit, who came to power in 2008 after their protests helped to bring down former governments, but relations have since soured.

Philippines bus blast kills four

AFP, Manila

A bomb on a packed bus in the Philippines' financial hub killed four people on Tuesday, sparking a warning from President Benigno Aquino that the country faced a raised terror threat.

Authorities said it was too early to say who was behind the explosion as the bus travelled along one of Manila's busiest roads, but Aquino ordered security forces on alert.

"We have asked the police and military and the intelligence services to review their threat assessment, with the end view of hardening all areas considered under threat," Aquino said in a nationally televised address.

Metropolitan Manila police said the bomb appeared to have been placed under one of the passenger seats.

Karzai to open Afghan House amid dispute

AFP, Kabul

President Hamid Karzai will open Afghanistan's new parliament this week under international pressure, but he has resisted MPs' demands to abolish a special tribunal set up to probe claims of election fraud.

Karzai last week delayed the opening of parliament for one month following disputes over September's parliamentary elections and protests around the country by losing candidates, pitting him against angry winners.

But the president's office said plans were now on track for today's inauguration, to be attended by top Western officials in Kabul, a day after Karzai agreed to attend, ending a tense four-day stand-off with lawmakers.

Hamid Elmi, a presidential spokesman, told AFP that preparations for the official inauguration were underway, a day after the US-backed leader agreed to attend the event following a tense four-day stand off with lawmakers.

Politicians welcomed the decision to open parliament but said Karzai's tribunal was unlawful and regular Afghan courts must handle outstanding claims of election irregularities.

"It is good news for the people of Afghanistan that the national assembly will be inaugurated Wednesday," leading politician Alemi Balkhi told AFP.

But an "absolute majority of the MPs say that the special tribunal is unconstitutional and its verdicts will not be recognised by the elected representatives of the people."

The row began when Karzai said last week he would delay the opening of parliament for one month following disputes over September's parliamentary elections.

Palestine slams US stance on settlements

AFP, Doha

Palestinian negotiator Nabil Shaath slammed a US stance opposing Palestinian efforts calling for a UN Security Council resolution to halt Israeli settlement construction.

The Palestinians will address the UN Security Council "whether or not the United States wants it," Shaath told reporters on Monday evening in Doha.

"If you use the veto against this resolution, you will forever lose what's left of your credibility as a sponsor of the peace process," he told the United States.

"The only way that there will be a resolution of the conflict ... is through a negotiated settlement," Clinton said. "Therefore we don't see action at the UN or any other forum as being helpful in bringing about this desired outcome."

But Shaath argued that "we have 14 members (of the UN Security Council) to our side."

India closes Kashmir to block BJP rally

AFP, Madhopur, India

Authorities in India yesterday blocked all road links between Kashmir and neighbouring states to prevent Hindu nationalists from holding a rally in the sensitive region.

The right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had planned to pour young Hindu volunteers into the Muslim-majority region for India's Republic Day on Wednesday and raise the national flag in Kashmir's main city of Srinagar.

Kashmir is home to a long and violent separatist uprising, and Indian officials fear the BJP's proposed rally could trigger major communal unrest.

A stand-off developed yesterday in the town of Madhopur on the border between Punjab state and Kashmir as police stopped about 3,000 BJP activists from crossing a bridge on their way to Srinagar.

"We will not allow anyone to enter Kashmir today. All borders have been sealed and highways are blocked," Gareeb Das, a senior police officer stationed in Madhopur town, told AFP.

"Multi-tearshell launcher vehicles and water cannons have been deployed at all entry points."

The BJP said it was determined to get to Srinagar. "No one has the right to stop us from hoisting the Indian flag in Kashmir. We will not change our plan," Anurag Thakur, president of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the youth wing of the BJP, told AFP.

India's Home Minister P. Chidambaram has appealed to the BJP to respect the orders of the Kashmir state government and call off the flag-hoisting plan.

Pro-independence Kashmiris have also vowed to protest on Republic Day, raising fears of a return to violence after massive anti-India protests last year in which at least 100 protesters were killed.

For 20 years, a separatist insurgency has raged in the Indian sector, claiming 47,000 lives.

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Albanian PM praises army for averting 'coup'

AFP, Tirana

Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha yesterday congratulated the army for defending government institutions and foiling a "coup d'etat" during a violent opposition protest that left three dead last week.

"January 21 was the first coup attempt, and the attempts to seize the democratic institutions by violent means will continue," he said apparently referring to the new opposition protest called for Friday.

In a public show of support for the security forces the prime minister met with Albanian army generals at the ministry of defence yesterday.

Last week's Friday, three people were killed after violent clashes erupted against government.

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Invitation for Bids for Procurement of Fruit Tree Saplings

Credit No. 4507 - BD, Project ID No. UTF /BGD/ 040 /BGD, Bid Package No.2G8.C Lot 3

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the Emergency 2007 Cyclone Recovery and Restoration Project, and it intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for the Procurement of Fruit Tree Saplings. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the supply of 16550 Sets of Fruit Tree Saplings, each set containing five different types of saplings against Lot 3 under Package No. 2G8.C. Bidders having a minimum of 3 (three) years of experience in the supply of the tendered items are only encouraged to participate. The delivery period is 6 (six) weeks from the date of the Notification of the Award.

Bidding will be conducted through the national competitive bidding procedures as specified in the World Bank's Guidelines: Procurement under IBRD Loans and IDA Credits, (current edition), and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the guidelines.

Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding documents from the office of FAO Representation in Bangladesh at the address below during office hours i.e. 08:00 to 16:30 hours. A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested bidders on the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a non refundable fee of Tk.1,500.00. The method of payment for the tender documents will be in cash against a written receipt.

All bids must be accompanied by a bid security for an amount of Tk. 100,000.00 (One Hundred thousand) only.

Bids shall be delivered to the address below by 02:00 p.m. on 22 February 2011. They will be opened immediately thereafter, in the presence of bidders' representatives, who choose to attend, at the address below. Late bids will be rejected.

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