



Former Maldives president Mohamed Nasheed, centre, greets people after Friday prayers in Male yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## India sends special envoy to Maldives

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

As the political turmoil in Maldives deepened, India yesterday sent its special envoy to assess the situation in the island nation.

M Ganapathi, Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, flew to Male with a brief to assess the situation in the Indian Ocean atoll which has plunged into a crisis after the ouster of Mohd Nasheed as President.

"I have sent an envoy to Maldives to assess the situation," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told reporters here.

Singh said it was his sincere hope that the matter can be resolved through a peaceful dialogue.

A Maldivian court has issued a warrant for the arrest of Nasheed, a day after his supporters went on a rampage in Male.

## Indian SC nixes army chief's age plea

IANS, New Delhi

In a major blow to Indian Army chief General VK Singh, the Supreme Court yesterday refused to entertain his plea challenging a government order setting his birth date as May 10, 1950 and said it will be forced to dump it if he did not withdraw it.

The court order has left Gen Singh with little option over his dragging contention that he was actually born on May 10, 1951 not 1950 and that the issue concerned his "honour and integrity".

Hearing his petition at the admission stage, the apex court also asked the army chief to honour his letters of 2008 and 2009 accepting 1950 as his birth year.

It noted that the government order recognising his birth year as 1950 does not suffer from perversity and was not grossly erroneous.

The court said there was no prejudice vis-a-vis Gen Singh and that the government had full faith in him.

Earlier in the day, the government told the court that it had withdrawn a Dec 30, 2011 order rejecting Gen Singh's plea to reconcile his birth date to May 10, 1950 which prompted him to move the court.

The court had then said that the Dec 30, 2011 order was "vitiated" by opinion given by Vahanvati in July 2011 that led the government to reject the army chief's request on his age.

While the army chief maintains that he was born in 1951, the government insists he was born a year earlier.

The discrepancy was pointed out by the Military Secretary's branch in 2006 when Gen. Singh was being considered for promotion as corps commander.

## India test-fires missile interceptor

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday successfully test-fired indigenously developed supersonic interceptor missile as part of its plan to deploy a two-layer shield against incoming enemy ballistic missile.

The surface-to-surface target missile was first lifted from the launch Complex III at Integrated Test Range in eastern state Orissa off Bay of Bengal at around 1013 hours, defence sources said.

The missile successfully destroyed a simulated incoming enemy missile. The interceptor missile was fired a few minutes after the target missile was launched.

"The interceptor directly hit the target and destroyed it," SP Dash, Director of the Test Range, said.

The last flight of interceptor missile was conducted on March 6 last year.

# US recognises new Maldives president

## Defiant Nasheed leads rally, demands early polls

AGENCIES

Defiant former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed yesterday led a street rally in Male and voiced bitter disappointment Friday at the US decision to recognise his successor, who Nasheed suspects of conspiring in his removal from office three days after what he says was a coup that forced him to resign.

Nasheed's efforts to force new President Mohamed Waheed to step down received a major blow Thursday when Washington announced it was conferring a stamp of legitimacy on Waheed's administration.

When asked if the US recognised the new government, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland replied: "Wedo."

"This is not being helpful. They should really look at what has happened," said Nasheed, who insists that his resignation on Tuesday was the result of a coup d'etat

orchestrated by opposition leaders backed by the security forces.

He suggested the US move would only serve to inflame tensions in the Maldives, which was rocked by several days of violent protests following Nasheed's ouster.

"I am very unhappy," Nasheed told reporters as after he leading a rally after Friday prayers.

Nasheed - who stepped down on Tuesday - got a rapturous reception from his supporters as he emerged from Male's main mosque after Friday prayers, the BBC's Andrew North in the capital reports. There were no reports of violence.

In the rally, he reiterated that he was no longer calling for his reinstatement as president, but wanted snap elections to resolve the stand-off.

So far, there has been no sign of the new government trying to carry out a warrant it says it has issued for

Nasheed's arrest.

Earlier, Nasheed told the BBC that the new president should hand over power to the Speaker of parliament in order to hold elections within two months.

At Friday's rally, Nasheed also complained of the arrest of several members of his party on the island of Addhu - about an hour's flight from Male.

Large numbers of soldiers and police with batons, helmets and tear gas canisters were deployed near the mosque in the capital.

Meanwhile, a UN envoy is holding talks to try to end violent protests which followed Nasheed's resignation.

UN Assistant Secretary General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco is expected to meet both rival leaders of the tiny Indian Ocean nation. He earlier urged all sides to "remain calm and prevent any type of violence".

## INDIAN ASSEMBLY POLLS, 2012

# High turnout leaves all parties guessing in UP

PTI, Lucknow

It might be too early to predict which way the wind is blowing in UP, but the high turnout in the first phase has left all political parties worried about the outcome. In public, all the major players have claimed that the record 62% turnout signalled a wave in their favour, but in private they admitted they had very little clue what this would bode as the surge in numbers was fuelled largely by young voters who may have defied the easy equations of the past.

With stakes very high, every party is following the principle of holding on to its core vote bank while poaching on others' turf. They all ensured that their voters came out in large numbers on polling day. However, none of them expected that the average voting would hit 62% compared with a 46% in 2007.

The theories floating around are that the high turnout of urban middle class Hindus would benefit the BJP; the increase in voting of pasmanda (backward) Muslims would go in favour of SP and Congress; and the long queues in rural and urban areas dominated

by Dalits and most backward classes would favour the ruling BSP which is battling strong anti-incumbency.

While BSP leaders in off-the-record conversations admit that the good turnout in urban areas might help Congress and BJP, the Congress was apprehensive about the outcome of huge turnout of Mayawati supporters in Dalit-dominated areas. SP leaders on the other hand are worried about a possible split in Muslim votes due to aggressive poaching by the Congress and smaller parties like the Peace Party.

One thing, though, became clear while talking to a cross-section of voters: there is a deep sense of anguish against the establishment -- be it the state or the central government or the local MLA. People want change and development.

The issues before the youth are not only development and good governance but also employment opportunities and better agriculture prospects. The gross enrolment ratio in the higher education in UP is only 14% against the national average of 18%.

## Blasts injure 7 at Imran Khan's rally

AFP, Peshawar

At least seven people were injured yesterday in grenade explosions after a public rally held by Pakistan's wildcard politician Imran Khan near the northwestern town of Swabi, police said.

"Unknown men threw two hand grenades on a police van and later opened fire after Khan's public meeting on the outskirts of Swabi, wounding seven people", local police official Muhammad Shah said.

Shah said Khan had already left the venue when the attack happened.

The 59-year-old former cricketer Khan has ridden a wave of support buoyed by mass rallies and has openly backed the courts' pursuit of embattled President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani.

# Scientist makes 'Avatar' robot

AFP, Yokohama

A Japanese-developed robot that mimics the movements of its human controller is bringing the Hollywood blockbuster "Avatar" one step closer to reality.

Users of the TELESAR V don special equipment that allows them not only to direct the actions of a remote machine, but also to see, hear and feel the same things as their doppelganger android.

"When I put on the devices and move my body, I see my hands having turned into the robot hands. When I move my head, I get a different view from the one I had before," said researcher Sho Kamuro.

"It's a strange experience that makes you wonder if you've really become a robot," he told AFP.

Professor Susumu Tachi, who specialises in engineering and virtual reality at Keio University's Graduate School of Media Design, said systems attached to the operator's headgear, vest and gloves send detailed instructions to the robot, which then mimics the user's every move.

At the same time, an array of sensors on the android relays a stream of information which is converted into sensa-



An operator, wearing a special HMD and a pair of gloves, controls a master-slave robot.

tions for the user.

The thin polyester gloves the operator wears are lined with semiconductors and tiny motors to allow the user to "feel" what the mechanical hands are touching -- a smooth or a bumpy surface as well as heat and cold.

The robot's "eyes" are actually cameras capturing images that appear on tiny video screens in front of the user's eyes, allowing them to see in three dimensions.

Microphones on the robot pick up sounds, while its speakers allow the operator to make his voice heard by those near the machine.

The TELESAR -- TElexistence Surrogate Anthropomorphic Robot -- is still a far cry from the futuristic creations of James Cameron's "Avatar", where US soldiers are able to remotely control the genetically engineered bodies of an extra-terrestrial race they wish to subdue.

# Nazimuddin fuelled the flames

FROM PAGE 1

Liaquat. The finance minister, Ghulam Mohammad, became the new governor general.

The changes at the centre did not, of course, affect the Bengali struggle over the language issue. A kind of stalemate appeared to have come into the situation, but soon the issue took on a new dimension when Khwaja Nazimuddin, as prime minister, came down to Dhaka on a visit in January 1952. At a public rally on January 27, he reiterated the

old case of the Pakistani establishment that in line with the Basic Principles Committee (BPC) report, only Urdu would be the state language of the country. East Bengal Chief Minister Nurul Amin, who was seated on the dais when Nazimuddin made his remarks, was clearly irritated by the governor general's remarks.

More than two decades later, following the liberation of Bangladesh, Nurul Amin would note:

"In the course of (Nazimuddin's) lengthy speech from a written script he mentioned that Urdu shall be the state language. The statement was not only uncalled for but also inconsistent with the stand of the Muslim League members of the CA (constituent assembly) from East Pakistan and the assurances received from a section of their counterparts from the West. It is also worth mentioning here that the prime minister seemed to have been so

effectively briefed from interested quarters that he kept such an inflammable issue a guarded secret from me even and did not have the courtesy to consult me if it was a matter worth forming a subject of his speech in the meeting. I was sitting on the dais where he was speaking from and as soon as he uttered the sentence I could foresee its consequences. When I charged him after the meeting, he told me the briefing was prepared in Karachi."

# Sorry tale of torture, abuse

FROM PAGE 20

of borrowing.

Like Hasina, many more female migrant workers often become victims of rape, sexual assault and torture and are also deprived of labour rights in the East Mediterranean nation.

The list of such victims might be a long one, but nobody has the exact data.

According to different migrants' rights bodies, several hundred Bangladeshi maidservants returned from Lebanon in the last two years after facing oppression and exploitation.

They fear there could be hundreds more languishing in Lebanon, which currently employs the highest number of housemaids from Bangladesh. Of around 2 lakh female Bangladeshi migrants there, about 60,000 are domestic help.

Rahima, a teenager from Faridpur, was beaten regularly and denied food and rest by her employer in Beirut. After undergoing 45 days of dreadful torture, she ran away.

Wandering around the city, she met a stranger who

promised her shelter and a job. But he later violated her and left her on a street.

The Red Cross then picked her up and dropped her at Caritas Lebanon Migrants' Centre, which in partnership with the rights body Okup arranged her repatriation on August 29 last year.

"She was ill, both physically and mentally. She could not even remember her address when we sheltered her in Dhaka," said Okup Executive Director Shakirul Islam. Later she was sent home to Faridpur.

Another victim, Rumki, from Savar returned home on January 7 with a broken hand and stitches on both feet, said her husband Ranjit.

She jumped off the third floor of her work place to commit suicide after suffering through months of torture and abuse by her employer.

"She appears to be mentally ill and cannot speak normally," added Ranjit.

In Lebanon, the most common problems the expatriate workers face include non-payment of

wages, extended working hours, forced confinement at the workplace, inadequate weekly leave, seizure of identity documents and physical and sexual abuse, according to a report published by the US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2010.

Unable to withstand the abuse, many of the maidservants even commit suicide.

The HRW, in another report in August 2008, said 95 expatriate housemaids have died in Lebanon since January 2007. The respective embassies of the dead classified 40 of them as suicidal deaths while 24 others died falling from high-rise buildings, often trying to escape from the clutches of their employers.

Joyal Abedin Joy, chairman of Bangladesh Migrants' Foundation, said the authorities in Lebanon mention accidents or heart attacks as reasons for the deaths, though the workers actually die of severe torture or by committing suicide.

Referring to the body of a maid servant brought to

Manikganj from Lebanon a few months ago, Taslima Akhter of the female migrants' rights body Bomsa said accident was shown as the reason behind her death. But obvious injury marks on her body hint at something different.

Bangladeshi women in Lebanon have been working in very vulnerable conditions, mainly due to the fact that Lebanese labour law guarantees only the local workers of their rights such as weekly day off, working hour limits, paid holidays and compensation, said Shakirul Islam of Okup.

Besides, Bangladesh does not have a mission in Lebanon to look after the women workers, he pointed out.

According to an official of the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry, there are an honorary consular and two welfare officers. The labour attaché posted in Jordan is also responsible for Lebanon.

Note: Actual names of the victims have not been used.

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