

New strain in ties emerges

Kathmandu recalls New Delhi envoy, scraps president's visit

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal has recalled its ambassador to India and cancelled an upcoming visit by its president to New Delhi, officials said yesterday, further straining ties between the two neighbours after months of tension.

Deep Kumar Upadhyay was recalled to Kathmandu late Friday after allegedly siding with the Nepali Congress opposition in supporting a threat by the Maoist party to topple Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's government, sources said.

Nepal's parliament was thrown into chaos last week after the Maoists threatened to pull out of the ruling coalition and dislodge the prime minister -- a move reportedly also backed by India. The Maoists later decided to continue supporting the government. "He

(Upadhyay) is close to Nepali Congress and seemed to play an internal role in the exercise to change the government, that was the main reason (for his recall)," an official source told AFP on condition of anonymity. Upadhyay was appointed by the former Nepali Congress-led government in April 2015.

A foreign affairs adviser to Prime Minister Oli did not give a specific reason for the envoy's recall.

"A government has the right to recall an

envoy if he does not correctly represent the country, and the decision was taken accordingly," Gopal Khanal said.

It came as President Bidhya Devi Bhandari was forced to suspend her first official visit to India, scheduled to start tomorrow, after the Nepali government Friday failed to endorse the trip.

Nepal's relationship with India -- which is often accused of acting as a "big brother" to its smaller, impoverished neighbour -- has been strained since a months-long border blockade last year.

The blockade, by Nepal's Madhesi ethnic minority, came in protest at a new constitution which they said left them politically marginalised, with more than 50 people dying in clashes with police.

Kathmandu accused India of imposing an "unofficial blockade" on the landlocked nation in support of the Madhesis, who share close cultural, linguistic and family links with Indians across the border.

Prime Minister Oli visited India in February in a bid to smooth ties.

But Guna Raj Luitel, editor of the Nepali daily Nagarik, said the latest developments suggested relations between the two countries had not improved as much as previously thought.



NEPAL-INDIA TIES

Helpless in the face of cruelty

Brother tries to suffocate himself in Greece as sister dies in Syria

AGENCIES

A Syrian refugee has tried to suffocate himself at a camp in Greece after finding out his sister was among hundreds of civilians killed in Aleppo.

Meanwhile, displaced families returned home and schools reopened in rebel-held districts of Syria's Aleppo yesterday after a truce was extended for 72 hours in the battleground northern city.

An Irish doctor working in Idomeni, Dr Connor Kenny, described the moment the distraught man was brought to a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) clinic.

Dr Kenny said the refugee, a 22-year-old man called Hamza, only became more agitated as medics tried to treat him.

"Seeing his extreme distress, my initial thought was that it was a surgical problem -- possibly a kidney stone or a perforation in the gut," he added.

"But during my assessment of his airway, it became obvious he was forcibly trying to swallow his tongue, actively holding his breath at the same time. As a result his oxygen levels were falling."

With the help of translator, friends explained that Hamza had just been told his sister had been killed in an air strike in Aleppo.

"He was so stricken with grief that he was now trying to seriously harm himself," Dr Kenny said.

"When I first arrived in Idomeni, this might have shocked me, or at least made me feel slightly surprised. But now it

doesn't."

The doctor said he had seen several refugees become seriously ill after hearing news of their loved one's deaths, including a 68-year-old woman also from Aleppo who has been carried to the MSF clinic several times after fainting, following the loss of a relative in bombardment of the city. No "medical reason" for the responses has been found, but a concerning pattern is forming, affecting refugees of all ages who have managed to reach the camp after making the treacherous boat crossing from Turkey to Greece.

TRUCE EXTENDED IN ALEPPO

More than 300 civilians were killed in two weeks of fighting in the divided city before the truce took hold on Thursday, with regime air strikes on its opposition-held east and rebel shelling on its regime-controlled west.

A new wave of refugees has been fleeing Syria after bombardment re-started in Aleppo last month despite the "cessation of hostilities"



earlier this year.

The Syrian government and its Russian allies have denied responsibility for civilian casualties after condemnation by the United Nations and international calls for a war crimes investigation.

The international community hopes that a drop in fighting can revive faltering peace talks to end a five-year war that has killed more than 270,000 people and displaced millions.

'More than 50' IS mass graves found in Iraq

BBC ONLINE

A UN envoy has said more than 50 mass graves have so far been found in parts of Iraq that were previously controlled by so-called Islamic State (IS).

Jan Kubis told the UN Security Council that it was "evidence of the heinous crimes" IS had committed.

The graves have been discovered in recent months as territory has been recaptured from IS.

Most recently, graves found in the city of Ramadi in April may contain the remains of up to 40 people.

Kubis said the international community should "take steps to ensure the accountability" of IS fighters.

The Iraqi army re-captured parts of Ramadi from IS in December 2015. It had been held by the militants since May of the same year.

Some pockets of resistance continued in the city until February 2016, when it fell completely under government control again.

Human remains have been found in mass graves near Sinjar in northern Iraq, near Anbar in western Iraq and in Tikrit in northern Iraq.

The people targeted include tribesmen, Iraqi soldiers, women and people from the minority Yazidi sect.

Mass graves have also been found in parts of Syria where IS have held control.

Kubis is the UN's special representative in its assistance mission for Iraq.

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the continued killings, kidnapping, rape and torture of Iraqis by ISIL (IS), which may constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and even genocide," he said.

Kubis said that despite "notable and consistent progress" against IS, the group was still "a formidable and determined enemy that constantly adjusts its tactics and attack patterns".

NEWS IN brief

'N Korea preparing for 5th nuclear test'

REUTERS, Washington

North Korea may be preparing to carry out a fifth nuclear test in the near future judging by commercial satellite images of the country's nuclear test site taken on May 5, a US think tank said on Friday. There has been intense speculation that North Korea may conduct its fifth test of a nuclear device during a congress of the ruling Workers' Party now underway.

US panel withholds \$450m aid to Pakistan

DAWN ONLINE

A US congressional panel has endorsed a draft bill that seeks to block \$450 million in aid to Pakistan for failing to take action against Afghanistan's militant Haqqani Network. The National Defence Authorisation Act for 2017, approved last week by the House Armed Services Committee, questions Pakistan's commitment to stopping militants from using its territory for conducting attacks.

Clashes in Kashmir after militants killed

AFP, Srinagar

Hundreds of villagers clashed with police in restive Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday after three armed militants were killed in an early morning gunbattle with government forces, the army and witnesses said. As word of the killings spread, hundreds of villagers came out onto the streets, throwing stones at police who fired tear gas to disperse the crowd, an officer said on condition of anonymity.

China unlocks \$1b UN fund

AFP, United Nations

China signed an agreement at the United Nations on Friday to begin unlocking a \$1 billion fund to support the world body's work in peace, security and development, with a first payment of \$200 million. Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the mega-fund at the UN General Assembly meeting in September, in a move widely seen as showcasing Beijing's status as a global player.

13 Iranian elite forces killed in Syria

AFP, Tehran

Thirteen military advisers with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been killed in Syria in recent days and 21 others wounded, Iranian media reported yesterday. All were from Iran's northern province of Mazandaran, Gholhossein Ali Rezayei, a Guards spokesman in the region, told the ISNA and Fars news agencies.



A wildfire burns as evacuees who were stranded north of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada head south of Fort McMurray on Highway 63. Inset, Home foundations and skeletons of possessions are all that remain in parts of a residential neighborhood destroyed by the wildfire in the area. The situation around a ferocious wildfire that forced the evacuation of the Canadian town of Fort McMurray remains unpredictable and dangerous, a minister said yesterday, warning that weather conditions were still hampering efforts to fight it.

PHOTO: AFP

Khan sworn in as London mayor

AFP, London

Sadiq Khan was sworn in as London mayor yesterday after being elected the first Muslim leader of a major Western capital, as the Conservatives defended attempts to link him to extremism during the campaign.

The opposition Labour lawmaker, the son of a Pakistani bus driver, broke from convention by taking his oath of office in a multi-faith ceremony at Southwark Cathedral.

"My name is Sadiq Khan and I'm the mayor of London," the 45-year-old said to cheers from supporters, who had earlier given him a standing ovation as he walked in.

He added: "I'm determined to lead the most transparent, engaged and accessible administration London has ever seen, and to represent every single community, and every single part of our city, as mayor for all Londoners."

Khan won 57 percent of the vote in Thursday's mayoral election, securing 1.3 million votes to see off multimillionaire Conservative Zac Goldsmith and make history as the city's first Muslim mayor.

In his victory speech in the early hours of yesterday morning, Khan had referenced the negative campaign against him by saying London had chosen "unity over division".

Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron had led the attacks against Khan for sharing platforms with radical Muslims at public events, and Goldsmith said he was "radical and divisive".



AL-QAEDA THREAT US sends troops to Yemen, steps up air strikes

AFP, Washington

The Pentagon acknowledged for the first time Friday it has deployed US troops to Yemen since the country's collapse last year to bolster government and Arab coalition forces battling al-Qaeda.

Spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis said the US military has also stepped up air strikes against fighters with Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

A "very small number" of American military personnel has been working from a "fixed location" with Yemeni and Arab coalition forces -- especially the Emiratis -- in recent weeks around Mukalla, a port city seized by AQAP a year ago, Davis said.

He said the troops were helping the Emiratis with "intelligence support," but declined to say if they are special operations forces.

Presidency 'not a reality show'

Obama urges media to expose Trump; Jeb Bush refuses to back GOP nominee

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama on Friday warned the White House race is not a "reality show" and called for Donald Trump's record to be held to close scrutiny as the billionaire seeks to rally divided Republicans behind him.

With Trump seizing the mantle of presumptive Republican nominee this week after his rivals exited the race, debate has turned to whether he will be able to rally the party faithful behind him between now and November.

Asked about Trump's candidacy and the resulting chaos on the Republican side, Obama offered some of his most pointed comments yet about the celebrity real estate mogul and longtime star of the TV show "The Apprentice," whose political rise has stunned the world.

"We are in serious times and this is a really serious job," Obama told reporters at the White House. "This is not entertainment. This is not a reality show."

"Every candidate, every nominee needs to be subject to exacting standards and genuine scrutiny."

Trump has raised howls of protest within his own party with his harsh,

free-wheeling speech and proposals ranging from banning Muslims from entering the United States to building a wall on the southern border to keep out Mexican migrants to slashing US funding for Nato so allies pay more.

"He has a long record that needs to be examined, and I think it's important for us to take seriously the statements he's made in the past," Obama said.



Secretary of State John Kerry piled on, telling a diverse and international graduating class at Northeastern University that they were "Donald Trump's worst nightmare."

"We will never come out on top if we accept advice from soundbite salesmen and carnival barkers who pretend the most powerful country on Earth can remain great by looking inward

and hiding behind walls," he said.

The words of warning came a day after the nation's top elected Republican official, House Speaker Paul Ryan, refused to support the presumptive nominee, saying Trump has "some work to do" to win over skeptics within his camp.

Possibly offering an olive branch, Ryan invited Trump to meet with him and fellow party leaders in the House next Thursday.

Ryan's warning to Trump threw the Grand Old Party deeper into soul-searching over how to mount a viable campaign against Democrat Hillary Clinton in November.

Several party elders -- including the last two Republican presidents, George W Bush and George HW Bush -- have refused outright to endorse Trump.

Senator Lindsey Graham became the latest establishment Republican to join the growing "anything but Trump" chorus.

He joined Jeb Bush in saying he would support neither Trump nor Clinton. The pair -- both dropped out of the race against Trump -- stressed that they will focus on the key goal of helping Republicans maintain their majorities in the House and Senate.

Scientists warn of 'global sleep crisis'

AFP, Washington

Social pressures are forcing people to cut back on their sleep, contributing to a "global sleep crisis," according to a new study based on research collected through a smartphone app named Entrain.

It enabled scientists from the University of Michigan to track sleep patterns around the world -- gathering data about how age, gender and the amount of natural light to which people are exposed affect sleep patterns in 100 countries -- and better understand how cultural pressures can override biological rhythms.

Sleep is driven by an internal "circadian" clock, a cluster of 20,000 nerve cells the size of a grain of rice located behind the eyes, and adjusted according to the amount of light captured, especially natural light.

The average amount of sleep in the world varies from a minimum of seven hours 24 minutes in Singapore and Japan to a maximum of eight hours 12 minutes in the Netherlands, the study found. Although a difference of 48 minutes may seem inconsequential, a lack of sleep for half an hour can have significant effects on cognitive function and health, the researchers said. People who need sleep suffer a reduction in their cognitive abilities without really being conscious of it, the new study says.

'Forget the laws on rights'

Philippine presidential favourite Duterte to 'butcher' criminals

AFP, Manila

Philippine presidential favourite Rodrigo Duterte vowed to forget human rights if he wins tomorrow's election and "butcher" criminals, in a typically savage tirade to end an explosive campaign.

Duterte, who has hypnotised millions of voters with his promises to eradicate crime and corruption, repeatedly warned tens of thousands of fans in Manila on Saturday night that there would be mass killings under his presidency.

"Forget the laws on human rights," said Duterte, as he boasted of killing criminals during his more than two decades as mayor of the southern city of Davao.

"If I make it to the presidential palace, I will do just what I did as mayor. You drug pushers, hold-up men and do-nothings, you better go out. Because as the mayor, I'd kill you."

human rights campaigners or other critics. "I will butcher him in front of them if they want," he said.

Duterte, 71, has made his threats to kill criminals the centrepiece of his campaign strategy, outraging critics but winning the hearts of many in an electorate who are fed up with lawlessness and corruption.

Duterte, who has also used foul language to help cast himself as an anti-establishment figure, has a lead of 11 percentage points going into tomorrow's election, according to the latest survey.

Senator Grace Poe, the adopted daughter of a late movie star, and establishment bedrock Mar Roxas, are tied in second place. Vice President Jejomar Binay, the early favourite, has fallen to fourth place under the weight of a barrage of corruption allegations.

Aside from his cuss-filled promises to kill, Duterte has rocked the political establishment with threats to instill one-man rule if lawmakers disobey him and create a revolutionary government that could rewrite the constitution.



Gaza violence flares for the fourth day

Israel raids Hamas targets after rocket fires

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli aircraft hit two Hamas targets in Gaza early yesterday in response to rocket fire as the worst flare-up of violence since a 2014 war entered a fourth day.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the rocket launch and most such fire since 2014 has been carried out by fringe Islamist groups but Israel holds Hamas responsible for all such attacks.

"Earlier today (Saturday)... a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip at southern Israel," the army said in a statement.

"In response... aircraft targeted two Hamas terror infrastructures in the southern Gaza Strip."

Hamas security sources said the retaliatory raid hit two brickworks in the southern city of Khan Yunis, causing damage but no casualties.

But witnesses said two missiles hit a base of Hamas's military wing east of the city, causing significant damage.

It was the fourth day of the worst cross-border violence since the 50-day war between Israel and Hamas which left 2,251 Palestinians and 73 Israelis dead in 2014.