

Nepal PM to visit India next week

REUTERS, New Delhi

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kumar Dahal will visit India next week and hold talks with Narendra Modi to strengthen the historically deep ties between the two countries.

The visit will "further strengthen the age-old, multifaceted, and cordial relations between Nepal and India," Nepal's foreign ministry said in a statement today.

The trip will be Dahal's first official foreign trip since he was elected prime minister in December 2022.

Dahal, a 68-year-old former Maoist rebel leader who goes by the name Prachanda, meaning "fierce", will also meet other senior Indian officials, including President Droupadi Murmu.

The four-day visit will begin on May 31 and will also include visits to the temple town of Ujjain and Indore.

"The visit continues the tradition of regular high level exchanges between India and Nepal in furtherance of our 'Neighbourhood First' policy," India's foreign ministry said.



People stand next to artist Benjamin Von Wong's art installation unveiled by the Greenpeace International, ahead of a four-day summit of the United Nations Environment Programme on reducing plastic pollution, in Paris, France yesterday. Inset, Actor Shailene Woodley and activists hold banners in front of the installation.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Avalanche kills 10 in northern Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

An avalanche killed at least 10 people in a remote area of northern Pakistan today, officials said, adding that poor weather and limited accessibility were hampering rescue efforts.

The avalanche, which also injured more than 10 people, happened near the Shounter Pass that connects the Gilgit Baltistan region with Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

"A group of around 35 nomads who were returning from Kashmir had set up camp close to a ravine," rescue official Subah Khan told AFP.

"They were struck by an avalanche late at night that caused at least 10 deaths."

Major Hong Kong democratic party to disband

AFP, Hong Kong

The Civic Party, one of Hong Kong's most prominent pro-democracy groups, voted yesterday to disband due to a leadership vacuum, after its members were squeezed out of local councils and charged under Beijing's national security law.

Nicknamed "the barristers' party", it was founded in 2006 by professional elites – mostly from the legal sector – who wanted to promote democratisation and civil society in Hong Kong.

The party was among the last few standing opposition groups, as political dissent has been outlawed under 2020's national security law, and civil society in Hong Kong has been forced underground or driven into exile.

CRACKDOWN ON IMRAN KHAN

Pakistan establishment closes ranks

AFP, Islamabad

With military courts, intimidation of the press and mass arrests, Pakistan's rulers are seeking to destroy former prime minister Imran Khan's support ahead of elections, analysts say.

Khan's brief arrest earlier this month sparked days of street protests.

Islamabad has labelled the violence "anti-state", justifying huge roundups and the revival of army courts to try civilians who targeted government and military buildings.

Journalists, lawyers and activists in Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party report campaigns of intimidation and influence which they blame on the "establishment."

"They want to make it clear to Imran Khan that he can't fight with the establishment," said analyst Hasan Askari.

"People are being broken," he told AFP. "By exerting pressure in different ways, they are trying to put the politicians in their place."

The military's media wing did not respond to repeated requests for comment by AFP.

In the days following the protests, more than a dozen of his senior leadership were repeatedly arrested and released on allegations of instigating the violence.

In press conferences after being freed, some of his closest aides condemned the violence and announced they were parting ways with Khan.

"They have put everyone in jail," Khan complained in an address. "If

you say the magic words, 'We are no longer in PTI', then you will be released."

In Khan's power base in the eastern city of Lahore, a grassroots PTI supporter said her son was arrested after protesting peacefully.

"It was clear that he had been beaten and was visibly scared," the housewife told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Amnesty International said "overly broad and vague anti-terrorism provisions" are being used and "a pall of fear hangs over Khan's supporters following the arbitrary arrests of many opposition leaders".

"It is a familiar story. A political party, thinking it can take on the country's all-powerful establishment, crosses a red line and quickly finds itself losing a ruthless, one-sided war of attrition," said an editorial in the Dawn newspaper.

"The only way out is to do exactly what you are told."

Journalists in Karachi told AFP they were being sent streams of briefings by the army public relations wing targeting Khan's reputation.

"We get a lot of smearing news from the 'big brothers' on WhatsApp, which are supposed to be off the record and we are obliged to broadcast without any attribution," a TV reporter said on condition of anonymity, using a euphemism for the army.

"We observe self-censorship voluntarily to avoid any nuisance," one more reporter admitted.

Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International have said prominent pro-PTI reporter

Imran Riaz Khan has been missing since being abducted by military intelligence agencies two weeks ago.

Media has been saturated with pro-army content since Khan's arrest, including a "Martyrs' Day" hastily announced on Thursday.

Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center said it was "not a surprise that the army would want to apply a PR blitz".

"It's suffered major blows to its popularity and even its credibility because of Khan's anti-army narratives," he added.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has openly criticised the Supreme Court after they ruled Khan's arrest illegal.

"Police behaviour, delaying tactics, and other legal complications purposely created by the authorities are a hindrance in the way of quick justice," Supreme Court barrister Gohar Ali Khan – a member of Khan's legal team – said.

The government meanwhile approved the use of military courts to try protesters.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said it was "the consequences of Mr. Khan's actions".

As the simultaneous confrontations play out between Khan and the army chief, and the government and the judiciary, the former leader is becoming increasingly isolated.

"My bottom line view is that the top civilian and military leadership appears to be all in on this goal of dismantling the PTI altogether," said analyst Kugelman.



Activists of ruling party Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) throw shoes at a wall poster of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party members, in Rawalpindi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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