

Nepal government gears up to break Terai strike

Nepal's government Tuesday started marshalling its forces to break the indefinite strike called in the Terai plains in the south by ethnic Indian protesters, beefing up security on highways to give confidence to transporters.

After a weeklong transport strike and blockade of trading points on the Indo-Nepal border, the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, a socio-political group demanding an autonomous Madhes region for plains people in the Terai belt, began enforcing an indefinite general strike in the plains from Tuesday.

'We are fighting for our rights and our fight will continue till we get them,' Upendra Yadav, chief of the forum, told IANS. 'If the government really wants to correct social imbalances, it should punish the Maoists who broke the peace pact they signed and killed our supporters.'

At least 31 people have died in the protests so far while property and infrastructure worth millions have been destroyed.

The forum says it will not begin dialogue with the seven-party government till Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula resigns for the deaths and a high-level commission is constituted to bring to task the police officials and Maoists behind the killings.

On Monday, the government began a series of moves to outmanoeuvre the protesters.

Ministers held talks with transport operators and persuaded them to ply during the strike, assuring them of enhanced security and compensation in case of damage to vehicles.

The trade unions affiliated to the ruling seven parties threw their weight behind the government, saying they would defy the strike call.

As the protest entered its first day Tuesday, while it was effective in the towns where the forum has a stronghold, in other areas, markets and educational institutions were said to be open.

The government also moved to draw other protesting groups to the talks table.

Just as it had done for the Maoists, it decided to withdraw the arrest warrants for the two main armed groups in the plains - the two factions of the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha comprising former Maoists.

Meanwhile, the fear of fresh scarcity of food supplies and fuel began stalking the kingdom.

There was also rising concern among industries and businesses.

An earlier three-week protest in the plains by the forum had crippled Nepal's industries, cutting off the supply of raw material from India and other countries and preventing the movement of finished goods to retailers.x

Sudeshna Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)