

Kathmandu valley hit by serial blasts

A year after the Maoist rebels signed a peace pact with the government and ended their guerrilla war, a series of bombs exploded in at least five busy areas of Kathmandu valley Sunday afternoon, spreading panic and casting doubts about the upcoming election.

Early reports said four people, including three schoolchildren, were killed and over half a dozen injured in the blasts.

Four of the busiest areas in the capital, Balaju, Kalimati, Tundikhel and Tripureshwor, were targeted by unknown attackers.

Around 4.15 p.m., a bomb went off before the gate of the Balaju Industrial Area, killing one person.

About the same time, another bomb went off in front of the newly built World Trade Centre in Tripureshwor, Kathmandu's tallest shopping complex and conference area.

The blast hit students of a nearby school, Vishwa Niketan, who were waiting on the road to catch public buses back home.

Anita K.C., Bobby Shah and Sandhya Khadka died while getting into their bus, a private radio station, Gorkha Radio, said.

However, there was no immediate official confirmation.

A fourth blast went off close to Tripureshwor in Tundikhel, near the army officers' club.

No one claimed responsibility for the explosions immediately and there was panic in the capital.

The blasts came on a day the capital was thrown out of gear by protests called by the Maoists to pressure the government into releasing over 40 of their cadres arrested last month after clashes with other student groups.

The Young Communist League (YCL), the youth wing of the Maoists, called a Kathmandu valley shutdown on next Sunday, which would be followed by an indefinite closure from Tuesday.

With just 80 days to go before the crucial election on November 22, Sunday's attacks would create new obstacles.

Journalist Kishore Shrestha, whose Jana Aastha tabloid is known for its contacts in the government and Maoists, predicted that the Maoists could pull out of the eight-party government and refuse to take part in the election.

They have already been pressuring the government to declare Nepal a republic immediately without waiting for the election.

The guerrillas are contending that King Gyanendra would not sit idly and let the election take place when it could jeopardise his crown.

Earlier this year, they persuaded the ruling parties to amend the constitution and add a provision.

The new provision says if parliament feels the king is trying to sabotage the election or foment any other anti-national activity, it can abolish monarchy through a proclamation provided two-third of the MPs agree.

On the other hand, two groups of former Maoists in the Terai plains have warned the government they would not allow the polls to be held till their demands are met.

To add to complications, an ethnic group with which the government last week inked a pact and averted fresh protests by them split Monday.

The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum that signed a deal with the government last week has stoked trouble both within the party and among the Maoists, who are condemning the pact.

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