

# Tigers demand overhaul of Norway's peace bid

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels Friday demanded a "radical overhaul" of Norway's peace bid in Sri Lanka and rejected the government's latest offer to save the faltering process.

The Tamil Tigers declined Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's offer to discuss an "interim administrative council" and said they will only join talks when the government unveils a "practical conceptual framework".

The Tigers' London-based chief peace negotiator, Anton Balasingham, said the rebels were also looking for a "new agenda" for the peace process, which has included six rounds of face-to-face negotiations.

"We will insist on a radical overhaul of the entire peace process," Balasingham said in remarks to the pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website and sent to media organisations here.

"We want a new, redefined agenda. We will discuss this matter with the Norwegian (peace) facilitators."

There was no immediate reaction from the peace broker Norway to the Tigers' call to re-do the negotiations. It was not clear what exact changes the Tigers contemplated in the peace process.

Talks had been held between the two delegations with four members on each side with Norway sitting in as a "facilitator".

The latest rejection came after Wickremesinghe in an address to the nation Thursday said the government hoped to establish an interim administrative council, conceding a key Tiger demand for starting talks.

The negotiations have remained deadlocked since April following the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) demand of an interim council with political powers ahead of a final settlement to the conflict that has claimed

more than 60,000 lives since 1972.

In his Sinhalese-language speech, Wickremesinghe said his government was committed to opening negotiations with the Tigers on the proposed council and hoped the Tigers would return to talks.

"To resolve the present crisis and enter peace talks is the responsibility of the LTTE," Wickremesinghe said. "I am confident they will honour their responsibility."

Wickremesinghe said he wanted the LTTE to actively participate in reconstruction and rehabilitation work in the northern and eastern regions.

"We expect a responsible and active participation from the LTTE. For this purpose we hope to establish an interim administrative council with the participation of the LTTE," he said.

The main opposition People's Alliance of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is highly critical of Wickremesinghe's handling of the peace process, said the government had no strategy in its dealings with the Tigers.

"The government really does not have a policy," People's Alliance spokesman Sarath Amunugama said.

The opposition party is opposed to the granting of an interim administrative council to the Tigers ahead of a final peace deal.

The government suggested Monday that the Tigers take part in finalising the scope and the composition of a proposed council in which the rebels would play a dominant role.

## India, Pakistan ready to resume bus service from July 1

AFP, New Delhi

Indian and Pakistani teams agreed Thursday in principle to resume bus service between the two countries from July 1 after a year-and-a-half hiatus following an easing of tensions between the neighbours.

"If things work out, we are ready to start the bus by July 1 and if Pakistan is ready, at a mutually agreeable date it will be started," Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told reporters.

"Operationally and technically we are ready to run the buses," said Delhi Transport Corporation Chairman A.J.S. Sahani, who led the Indian side in the hour-long talks.

The head of the three-member Pakistani delegation Afzar Shafqat, who is deputy managing director of the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, said: "We had agreement on all operational matters."

However, potential passengers still need to be issued visas and travel documents by the respective governments ahead of the first run.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (L) and Prince Charles arrives for the 50th annual dinner of the Pakistani society at Lincoln's Inn in London on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

Turkish rescuers search for survivors in the rubble of a dormitory at an Islamic high school early Friday in Kayseri, central Turkey. Ten people were killed and two were missing after a gas explosion, which was apparently accidental, ripped through a religious school dormitory and caused the building to collapse.

## Vajpayee's China trip may redraw roadmap for bilateral ties

PTI, Beijing

While a breakthrough may elude the vexed boundary issue, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's upcoming visit to China is expected to chart out a new dynamic roadmap for Sino-India relations in the 21st century.

The six-day official visit, the first by an Indian Prime Minister since 1993, is expected to inject momentum to the bilateral ties that has witnessed improvement in recent years.

India and China have intensified exchanges and cooperation in various fields, including counter-terrorism and in the military-to-military relations, analysts said.

"As a farsighted pioneer in restoring normal Sino-Indian relations in 1979 and a senior statesman of the world today, Vajpayee's visit to China will certainly be a new milestone in further developing the relations in an overall way," former Chinese Ambassador to India, Cheng Ruisheng said.

The strengthening of Sino-Indian relations through this visit will serve as a major stabilising factor for peace and security in the region, he said.

Noting that Vajpayee's visit will take place after new Chinese leaders assumed power in Beijing in March, former Chinese Ambassador to India, Zhou Gang said the trip would lay "solid foundation" for a 21st century-oriented good-neighbourly relationship between the two big Asian neighbours.

"The visit will impart a positive effect not only to Sino-Indian relations but also to the regional situation," Zhou, also secretary-general of the India-China Eminent Persons' Group said.

Zhou pointed out that China and India are both large, developing countries and friendly cooperation between the two nations would be conducive to regional and global peace and stability.

## '100 civilians killed in Aceh offensive'

AFP, Banda Aceh

Indonesian police said Friday that more than 100 civilians have been killed during a month-long military offensive to crush separatist rebels in Aceh province.

National police spokesman Zainuri Lubis said the victims have been identified by their families, who denied they were members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

"We stick to the principle of innocence before being proven guilty. If their families say they are not GAM members it is not fair for us to label them rebels," Lubis told AFP, adding that the figures did not include those people who died in gunfights with troops.

He said it was possible that many of the civilians had been killed by GAM rebels.

"A Javanese man who sold bakso (Javanese-style meatballs) could not be a rebel," he said, citing details of one death. Settlers in Aceh from Indonesia's main island of Java do not generally sympathise with

the separatists.

Indonesia on May 19 put Aceh under martial law and launched a major military offensive against GAM.

According to military figures, 225 rebels have now been killed and about 300 more have been arrested or surrendered since May 19. Some 28 soldiers have died.

The Indonesian Red Cross said it has collected 194 bodies since the start of the offensive but did not say whether they were believed to be civilians or rebels.

GAM has been fighting since 1976 for independence for the province on the northern tip of Sumatra island. More than 10,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since then.

Army chief General Ryamizard Ryacudu said Friday that GAM's funding had been cut off.

"They used to ambush people along the roads (to extort money) but now that line has been cut off," he said, as quoted by the official Antara news agency.

## ASEAN to step up pressure on Myanmar to free Suu Kyi

AFP, Phnom Penh

The ASEAN grouping is to step up pressure on member Myanmar to pursue democratic reforms, pushing for a mission to the military-ruled country to meet with democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, a minister said Friday.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Blas Ople said ASEAN foreign ministers, who ended their week-long meetings here Friday, were disappointed that their Myanmar counterpart could not give a "timeline" for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from detention or implementing promised constitutional reforms.

Minister Win Aung, gave "half answers" and "was not forthcoming", Ople complained.

"We were disappointed," he told reporters.

He said Myanmar should heed a call by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for an early release of its opposition leader because of pressure from across the globe, especially with the United

States and European Union stepping up sanctions.

"We are actually trying to avoid a situation where Myanmar will be completely isolated from the international community and before they are economically crippled by these sanctions," Ople said.

He said ASEAN would send a ministerial mission to Myanmar to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi at an indefinite date.

"But certainly, the mission will be taking off and going to Myanmar before the October ASEAN leaders summit in Bali," he said. "We are accountable to our leaders."

Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda, the new chairman of the policy-making ASEAN standing committee, is to lead and prepare the composition of the mission, Ople said.

The mission may be comprised of his counterparts from the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, he added.

The 10-member grouping also includes Brunei, Laos, and

Singapore.

Preferably, the mission would like to meet with the opposition leader "as a free person so that she can talk to us without any restrictions," Ople said.

Ople said the visit would aim to speed up the tempo of constitutional reforms promised by Myanmar, "using the experience of the other ASEAN countries which have gone through a similar struggle" in their history.

Asked whether Myanmar would be expelled from ASEAN if it disregarded its call for Aung San Suu Kyi's early release, Ople said "that will be too drastic."

But he said the Myanmar issue could prod ASEAN to adopt a human rights code binding all governments.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar had suggested at the meetings here that ASEAN adopt a declaration on human rights, which would bind all member states, including their legislature and their courts.



PHOTO: AFP

Kashmiri doctors examine Tauseef Ahmed (C) who was injured in a grenade explosion, in a hospital in Srinagar on Friday. Three policemen and 12 bystanders were injured when suspected Muslim militants threw a hand grenade at a police patrol in the busy township of Pulwama, some 30 km south of Srinagar.