

# Offer more power, we will revive talks: LTTE

AP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels on Tuesday said the deadlocked peace talks could be revived soon if the government offered them greater political power.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they were awaiting a government proposal for an interim administration that would give them political, administrative and financial power.

LTTE's London-based chief negotiator Anton Balasingham told the pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website that he held talks with Norwegian peace broker Erik Solheim on Monday on ending the impasse in peace negotiations with Colombo.

The LTTE pulled out of talks on April 21 after accusing the government of failure to deliver on promises made at six rounds of talks since September.

Balasingham insisted on the government proposing an interim administrative council that meets their demands before a final peace settlement to a conflict that has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

"If a concrete set of proposals is presented, the LTTE will study the framework and suggest improvements," Balasingham was quoted as saying on Tamilnet.

"Thereafter, the parties could enter into negotiations to formalise and finalise the envisaged interim administration," he said.

"Balasingham also explained to the Norwegian peace envoys the need to redefine the agenda for talks," the Tamilnet said.

"Instead of pursuing guidelines, milestones and road maps for an imaginary solution, the talks should address crucial issues related to the harsh existential realities of the ground situation."

## Death toll from derailed Indian train rises to 51

AFP, Mumbai

The death toll from a train accident in the western Indian state of Maharashtra at the weekend has jumped to 51 and could climb as the search for more bodies continued, a railway official said Tuesday.

"The toll has gone up to 51 and the number of injured remains at 25," said railway spokesman Vaishali Patange.

"The search for further bodies, if any, is still in progress."

Patange said of the 51 victims, 31 were males, 10 were women and nine were children. One body had yet to be identified.

Four coaches of a holiday train jumped the rails late Sunday near the town of Rajapur, 400 km south of Mumbai, when the train hit boulders on the track.

Railway officials said the boulders and mud rolled onto the tracks during a landslide brought on by heavy rains that lashed the region last week.

"Prima facie, it appears that the landslide and approaching train were concurrent, or the train must have hit the boulders just five or 10 minutes after the landslide," spokesman Nandu Telang had said Monday.

Last week the district of Sindhudurg, where the accident occurred, saw heavy rains of almost 500mm (20 inches).



PHOTO: AFP

Visiting Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (L) meets with Chinese President Hu Jintao on Tuesday at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Vajpayee arrived in Beijing late Sunday to bolster relations between the two countries and will be in China until June 27 with visits to Luoyang and Shanghai.

## Sikkim border row needs time to resolve: China

AFP, Beijing

China said Tuesday its territorial dispute with India over India's northeastern state of Sikkim still needed more time to be resolved, refuting reports that China has accepted Indian sovereignty over the area.

"About Sikkim, I think the question of Sikkim is a question left over from history and is an enduring one," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan said.

"This question cannot be solved overnight, but we hope this question can be resolved gradually."

Newspapers in India said Tuesday the two neighbors had come closer to resolving the dispute that has bedevilled their relations for decades during Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's

ongoing visit to China.

Reports said Beijing had tacitly acknowledged Indian sovereignty over Sikkim and in return New Delhi had agreed that Tibet was part of China.

Kong told a regular briefing India has acknowledged in a joint declaration signed between Vajpayee and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao Monday that Tibet was a part of Chinese territory, but he was vague about any agreement on Sikkim.

He said China and India had agreed to expand border trade, but did not elaborate.

To enhance trade, Indian reports said, an ancient pass through the Nathu La in Sikkim -- part of the old Silk Route -- will be reopened.

"The cross-border trade agreement was being considered an important move forward because it

is believed to include a tacit admission by the Chinese that Sikkim is a part of India," the Hindustan Times said.

Reports last year said Sikkim was eager to reopen a historic route to Tibet, shut since the merger of the Himalayan region with India in 1975.

Officials in Sikkim had argued the route across Nathu La, India's highest mountain pass at 15,000 feet (4,545 metres), could rev up trade and bring Tibetan Buddhists and Indian Hindus closer.

Asked by an Indian reporter whether China got more out of India than vice versa, Kong said he disagreed with that assessment, saying the joint declaration was a "win-win," "mutually beneficial" document.

## Suu Kyi not at infamous Insein jail: Myanmar

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar's detained pro-democracy opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is not being held at the infamous Insein prison as stated by the British government, the ruling military junta has told a Japanese envoy.

Japan's Deputy Foreign Minister Tetsuro Yano said military intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt had made it clear to him during talks Monday that Aung San Suu Kyi was not being held in the jail.

Britain's assertion last week that the Nobel peace laureate was languishing at Insein under a draconian internal security act, after the junta said she was only in "protective custody", drew widespread international outrage.

Asked if Aung San Suu Kyi was being held at Insein, Yano said: "Secretary Khin Nyunt made it clear that he is aware of this kind of information, however, (he said) it is not a fact, it is not a fact."

## Breakthrough in cancer treatment

AFP, Sydney

A new cancer treatment pioneered in Australia is to be put on trial by six top hospitals in Europe and the United States after being hailed a major breakthrough by a Washington conference.

The therapy has already shown outstanding results in tests on prostate cancer and leukaemia sufferers, it has minimal side effects and it could be available within two years, its developers said Tuesday.

It fights cancer and, potentially, HIV/AIDS by boosting the body's immune system to make it produce more of the vital T-cells that produce thymus, the gland which shrinks naturally after puberty.

The therapy is based on an existing class of drugs called GnRH analogues, which are used to block the production of sex hormones in people with prostate cancer, breast cancer and endometriosis.

It was developed by researchers at Melbourne's Monash University who discovered the GnRH analogues also acted to kick-start the T-cells.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian parliamentarian Kuldip Nayyar (C) is helped by Pakistani officials to lay a wreath at the mausoleum of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan on Tuesday in Karachi. Nayyar, who is leading a 12-member team of Indian parliamentarians to Pakistan, has urged both the nuclear rival countries to end hostilities and solve problems through dialogue.

## Pak troops take control of Afghan border area

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's radical Islamic parties Tuesday denounced an ongoing military operation in a northwestern tribal region, as authorities said government troops had secured almost all passes to block entry of fugitives from Afghanistan.

One Pakistani soldier was killed and another wounded in an exchange of gunfire with some resisting tribesmen Monday when troops were deployed in the Mohmand tribal region in an operation coordinated with US and Afghan forces active on the Afghan side. "The operation is dangerous for the country as it constitutes a violation of long standing agreement with tribesmen not to encroach upon their special status," warned Hafiz Hussain Ahmed, a leader of Pakistan's powerful Islamic alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA).

Ahmed said the operation topped the agenda of the alliance's leadership council meeting Monday in Peshawar, capital of North West Frontier Province which is ruled by the alliance.

The meeting participants agreed that the operation had the potential to destabilise the entire tribal region

and posed serious dangers.

"Any uprising against operations jointly sponsored by the Americans could spread to the entire tribal belt which will weaken country's ability to defend its eastern border with India."

Some 2,000 Pakistani troops, border scouts and tribal militias were mobilised at the Mohmand border while around 500 US and Afghan troops were on the Afghan side to block cross-border routes used by extremists to launch attacks.

"We have secured seven out of eight passes in the Mohmand and there is some resistance at just one pass," Interior Secretary Tasneem Noorani told AFP.

Noorani said negotiations were underway with the resisting tribesmen through a tribal Jirga (council) in order to resolve the problem.

"By-and-large, people of Mohmand agency have welcomed the deployment because it opens up the inaccessible area for development works."

He said one of the objectives of the operation was to fully secure the western border and remove the impression that there were still some "soft areas," that enabled

fugitives to enter Pakistani territory from the Afghan side.

"We will ensure that our western border is secure and nothing is left to chance."

Military spokesman Major General Shaukat Sultan also said that the border had been satisfactorily secured.

"There is only a very minor resistance, which is no cause for worry," he told AFP, adding that the resistance would be overcome "very soon."

"The purpose is to secure the border and (integrate) the area into the national mainstream."

US Special Forces troops and Afghan allies launched an air and ground offensive dubbed "Operation Unified Resolve" late last week to flush out and trap al-Qaeda fighters hiding in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces opposite Mohmand.

The tribal territory straddling the 2,600 km border with Afghanistan is home to deeply orthodox ethnic Pashtun tribes which are historically wary of government interference in their custom-bound lifestyle.

## Britain rolls out red carpet for Putin

AFP, London

Britain rolled out the red carpet Tuesday for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was coming to London for the first state visit by a Russian leader since tsarist times.

Over the next four days, Putin and his wife Lyudmila will stay at Buckingham Palace as the personal guests of Queen Elizabeth II, in a carefully choreographed display of warmer Anglo-Russian relations.

Prince Charles was to greet the Putins at Heathrow airport at 2:00 pm (1300 GMT), after which the Russian guests will ride in a gala Horse Guard carriage procession to the palace with the queen and Prince Philip.

In the evening, the British monarch is to host a state banquet in honour of her Russian guest, who is making the first state visit to Britain by a Russian leader since Queen Victoria hosted Tsar Alexander II in 1874.

President Putin and his wife Lyudmila will be feted in the palace's Ball Room at a grand dinner attended by 170 guests, with the queen's Body Guard of the Yeomen of the Guard on duty.

## Power out in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

The Iraqi capital suffered a power breakdown Monday night, which continued into Tuesday, AFP correspondents reported.

Four power stations supply Baghdad. Since the war, when electricity was out for most of the time, service had been restored for some 15 hours a day.

At the oil ministry, officials said they did not know what had caused the latest breakdown, which had already lasted more than 12 hours.

However, after suspected saboteurs blew up a gas pipeline northwest of Baghdad on Sunday, Iraqi officials warned that electricity production could be affected.

Hotels, restaurants and some buildings use their own generators to provide electricity.

## India test fires anti-aircraft missile again

AFP, Bhubaneswar

India on Tuesday fired a surface-to-air missile for the third time in as many days in a clear indication of stepped up tests of the domestically-designed weapons system.

The Trishul (Trident) missile was launched from a national missile range in the eastern Indian state of Orissa at 1:20 pm (0730 GMT), officials from the site said, describing the test as a "success."

Tuesday's launch of the Trishul, India's version of the US-made Patriot missile, was the third since Sunday.

The missile -- one of the five developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation since 1983 -- is powered by solid fuel and can deliver a 15-kilogram (33-pound) warhead up to nine kilometres (five miles) away.

The missile is being developed for the army, navy and the air force. The test came amid reports the Indian government was scrapping the development of the Trishul as its guidance system did not work.



PHOTO: AFP

A US soldier leads arrested 17-year-old student Khaled Salim with his hands tied behind his back towards a waiting army truck in the southern Baghdad suburb of Dura on Tuesday. Salim was arrested on his way to school, as a warning to others after he insulted US troops. US soldiers carried out house-to-house searches in Dura, detaining two people and confiscating weapons.

## 'Arrest of 130 Hamas men not conducive to truce'

AFP, Gaza City

The Islamist group Hamas warned Tuesday that the capture of 130 of its militants by the Israeli army was not conducive to a truce, as hardline Palestinian factions were still mulling their response to a ceasefire proposal.

"Hamas will evaluate its position (on the truce) when the time is appropriate, and it cannot do so as (Israel) raids Hebron and this criminal enemy perpetrates assassinations," Hamas leader Abdul Aziz al-Rantissi told AFP.

"We cannot make up our minds with our neck under the sword," he added.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and US President George W. Bush "must understand that, as well as those who dream that Hamas will adopt a new stance with its neck under the sword."

The Israeli army arrested some 150 suspected Palestinian militants in the West Bank overnight, including 130 suspected Hamas members in the southern city of Hebron alone.

The massive arrests were the

latest crackdown on Hamas after one of its military leaders in Hebron was shot dead by elite units on Saturday.

Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas has been spearheading negotiations aimed at convincing radical groups to stop anti-Israeli attacks as a step toward implementing the ailing roadmap for peace.

But Hamas, which has carried out the bulk of attacks since the intifada began in September 2000, and its smaller rival, Islamic Jihad, have consistently said they would not consider a truce as long as Israel continued to target its footsoldiers and military chiefs.

Islamic Jihad said Tuesday it had "started discussing the issue of a truce internally in the West Bank, Gaza, in Israeli jails and abroad."

"The Islamic Jihad will make a decision very shortly, in line with the interests and goals of the Palestinian people," Sheikh Bassam as-Saadi, a senior official in the West Bank, told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters numbering around 2,000 demonstrate outside the state capitol against the Ministerial Conference and Expo on Agricultural Science and Technology on Monday in Sacramento, California. The three-day international biotechnology conference, held with foreign ministers, scientists and health care experts from 120 countries, is touting the benefits of genetically modified food and how it can reduce hunger and improve nutrition in developing nations. Protesters say genetics isn't the answer to complex global food issues and complain the conference is simply a means to lower trade barriers.