

Deadly blast greets new US-Norway peace push

3 Lankan soldiers killed in landmine blast

AFP, Colombo

A powerful landmine killed three Sri Lankan soldiers yesterday as US and Norwegian envoys launched a new push for peace with Tamil separatist guerrillas, officials said.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) led the attack in the east coast district of Batticaloa where four people died and 23 were wounded last Thursday, a military official said by telephone.

The latest blast, which also wounded four soldiers sweeping a highway for mines, raised to 149 the number of people killed in an upsurge of violence since December.

Norway's top peace envoy Erik

Solheim flew into Colombo on Monday in a bid to jump start an ailing peace process amid fears that the bloodshed could reignite full-scale war.

Solheim was meeting US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns Monday in a concerted effort to halt the violence.

Burns would "reiterate the strong US desire to see all Sri Lankans work for peace," the US embassy said in a statement.

The under secretary would urge the government and rebels "to resume talks on strengthening the ceasefire agreement as soon as possible".

The peace envoys were also meeting separately with Sri Lankan leaders.

Solheim, Oslo's international development minister, was to travel to LTTE-held territory Wednesday for direct talks with Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The talks, to be held in Kilinochchi, a rebel-controlled area like much of the north and east, would focus on the "current situation and ground realities", said the LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham.

"We will discuss very important issues with the Norwegian minister," he said in a statement.

After months of arguing over a venue for peace talks, a government official said it was hoped a deal would be struck for a face-to-face meeting with the LTTE in

either Oslo or Geneva after a near three-year break.

"Solheim will be told that we are ready to compromise on the venue issue in the interest of getting talks started," said the official, asking not to be named.

The compromise offer and peace flurry spurred the Colombo stock exchange on Monday and the All Share Price Index rose 1.48 percent to 1938.69.

Prabhakaran warned President Mahinda Rajapakse last November to grant the minority Tamils autonomy or face war in 2006.

Violence has soared since Rajapakse won elections that same month, pledging to rein in the LTTE and review Norway's much-criticised role as peace-broker.



Chief Negotiator and Political Strategist of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton Balasingham (L) and LTTE political leader S. P. Thamichelvan (C) walking with LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran (R) after arriving in Kilinochchi yesterday by Sri Lankan Air Force helicopter.

Court appoints new chief judge for Saddam trial

AFP, Baghdad

With less than 24 hours to go before the resumption of the trial of ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, the court has appointed a new, previously unknown, presiding judge, a court official said yesterday.

Rauf Rashid Abdel Rahman, Kurd, has been appointed to preside over the hearings, the court's investigating judge Raed al-Juhfi told AFP.

He will initially replace outgoing chief judge Rizkar Mohammed Amin who resigned earlier this month after strong criticism at his way of running the court.

"He will remain as presiding judge until such a time as an official decision is taken on whether to accept judge Rizkar's resignation," Juhfi said.



President of Pakistani Islamic parties Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) Qazi Hussain Ahmed (2L) addresses a public meeting in Shabqadar, some 40km north of Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province yesterday. A provincial assembly in Islamabad-ruled northwest Pakistan demanded the expulsion of the US ambassador after a CIA airstrike killed 18 civilians in a remote border village.

Pak legislators call for expulsion of US envoy

AP, Peshawar

Lawmakers in northwestern Pakistan yesterday demanded the government to expel the American ambassador to Pakistan in response to a US airstrike that killed 18 people.

The unanimous resolution by the provincial assembly was unlikely to move the federal government to accept such a demand.

The lawmakers also condemned the Jan. 13 attack on three houses in the village of Damadola near the Afghan border and demanded an apology from the United States.

Pakistani and US officials have said the attack targeted a gathering of al-Qaeda leaders but Pakistan's prime minister disputed that account.

"If you just reflect on what happened, first we heard that there was a dinner meeting with all the seniors," Prime Minister Shaukat Azid said in an interview that aired Sunday on CNN. "I think that's a bizarre thought, because

these people don't get together for dinner in a terrain or environment like that."

"The area does see movement of people from across the border. But we have not found one body or one shred of evidence that these people were there," Azid said, adding that Washington failed to inform Pakistani officials of the airstrike in advance.

The assault killed 13 villagers, including women and children, causing widespread outrage in the Islamic nation of 150 million. It has also produced friction between Washington and Islamabad, a key ally in the war on terror.

On Monday, dozens of Islamic extremists and opposition leaders left the Pakistani capital of Islamabad for the northwestern city of Peshawar. From there they plan to travel to the Bajur tribal region, which includes Damadola, to protest the strike.

"We are going to Bajur to condemn the American attack that killed innocent people," said Pir Sabir Shah, a provincial opposition leader.

Car bomber kills 3 near Baghdad Green Zone

AP, AFP, Baghdad

A suicide car bomber killed at least three Iraqis yesterday near the Green Zone housing the US Embassy and Iraqi government, and the US military said two American airmen died in a roadside bomb blast north of the capital.

Intensive efforts continued to secure the release of kidnapped American Jill Carroll, 28, with US and Iraqi authorities conducting joint operations in a bid to free the journalist. Carroll was abducted in Baghdad on Jan. 7.

The suicide bomber targeted a police patrol near the Iranian Embassy, which is close to the checkpoint into the Green Zone known as the "Assassins' Gate," said the top Baghdad police officer, Maj. Gen. Abdul-Razaq al-Samarie.

Two civilians and a policeman were killed and six Iraqis wounded, including five more policemen, al-Samarie said.

Police and students clash in Nepal

Political leaders freed, polls candidate shot dead

AFP, REUTERS, Kathmandu

Police and students clashed in Nepal's capital Kathmandu yesterday as activists vowed more demonstrations against the king while party workers said four political leaders were freed from house arrest.

Dozens of students were involved in the clash at Amrit Science Campus in the capital Monday, an AFP photographer at the scene said.

No injuries of arrests were reported and the protest dispersed soon after it began.

A mass protest would take place on Tuesday at Durbar Square, where hundreds of youths clashed with police in running battles on Saturday, said Rajendra Prasad Pandey, from the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist

Leninist).

More than 200 people were arrested Saturday but most were later released, police said.

"On Tuesday a similar demonstration that took place in Durbar Square on Saturday will be held by the seven-party alliance at the same venue at two in the afternoon," Pandey said.

Student groups said they would support the protest.

In the latest incident, suspected Maoist rebels gunned down a royalist election candidate in broad daylight near his office in the southeastern town of Janakpur on Sunday, police said.

The United States, the European Union, India, Britain and Japan have all voiced concern at the royal government's actions over recent days and called on the king to start talking to the parties.

GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
DEPARTMENT OF SHIPPING
141-143 Motijheel C/A (8th Floor)
Dhaka - 1000

INVITATION FOR TENDERS

1 Ministry/Division	: Ministry of Shipping
2 Agency	: Department of Shipping
3 Procuring Entity Name	: Department of Shipping
4 Procuring Entity Code	: Not used at present
5 Procuring Entity District	: Dhaka
6 Invitation for	: Supply of Seafarers Identity Document Preparation and Verification System compliant with the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised) 2003 (ILO convention No. 185) and meeting ILO SID -0002 standard.
7 Invitation Ref No	: DOS-16/SID/05
8 Date	: 19/01/2006
9 Procurement Method	: National Open tendering Method
10 Budget and Source of Funds	: GOB Allocation
11 Development Partners (if applicable)	: None
12 Project / Programme Code (if applicable)	: N/A
13 Project / Programme Name (if applicable)	: N/A
14 Tender Package No.	: SID-01
15 Tender Package Name	: Seafarers Identity Document Preparation and Verification System.
16 Tender Publication Date	: 19/01/2006
17 Tender Last Selling Date	: 15/02/2006 during office hours
18 Tender Closing Date and Time	: 16/02/2006 at 11:00 am
19 Tender Opening Date and Time	: 16/02/2006 at 11:30 am
20 Name & Address of the office(s)	: Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A, (8th floor), Dhaka-1000
Selling Tender Document (Principal)	: N/A
Selling Tender Document (Others)	: Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A, (8th floor), Dhaka-1000
Receiving Tender Document	: Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A, (8th floor), Dhaka-1000
Opening Tender Document	: Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A, (8th floor), Dhaka-1000
21 Place/Date/Time of Pre-Tender Meeting	: Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A, (8th floor), Dhaka-1000 Date: 12/02/2006 Time: 10:30 am
22 Eligibility of Tenderer	: As per tender document
23 Brief Description of Goods or Works	: Supply of Seafarers Identity Document Preparation and Verification System compliant with the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised) 2003 (ILO Convention No. 185) and meeting ILO SID -0002 standard.
24 Brief Description of Related Services	: Installation, testing, commissioning, training, card designing etc.
25 Price of Tender Document (Tk)	: 1000.00 (Non-refundable)

26 Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location	Tender Security Amount (Tk)	Completion Time in Weeks / Months
01	Seafarers Identity Document Preparation and Verification system	Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A (8th floor), Dhaka-1000	213000.00	08 (eight) weeks from the date of contract signing.

27 Name of Official Inviting Tender : Muhammad Ahsan Ali
28 Designation of Official Inviting Tender : Director
29 Address of Official Inviting Tender : Department of Shipping, 141-143 Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.
30 Contact details of Official Inviting Tender : Phone: 9551158, FAX : 880-2-7168363; E-mail: dosgdgb@dtb.net.bd
31 The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders

Muhammad Ahsan Ali
Director

GD-133

'India pursuing composite dialogue with Pakistan'

PTI, UNI, Hyderabad

India is pursuing a composite dialogue process with Pakistan to resolve bilateral issues with the understanding that the two countries "shared a destiny," Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in Hyderabad yesterday.

"We are pursuing a composite dialogue with Pakistan with the understanding that in South Asia we have not just shared a past, but a shared future and a shared destiny," he said addressing the 82nd Congress Plenary Session.

Singh said his government had taken important steps to make the world adopt a more friendly approach to India.

"We have been able to improve our relations with many of our neighbours, including China... The development and well-being of all our neighbours is in our interests," he said.

Manmohan said India had taken major initiatives to integrate its economy with that of East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia and

West Asia.

"The countries to our east have once again embraced us and invited us into a new Asian Community. The Saudi Arabian King will visit us for the first time in fifty years this week. We have also improved our relations with all major powers, especially with the US, European Union, Russia and Japan. In the next few weeks, I will be receiving the Presidents of France and US," Singh added.

Accusing the BJP of creating "difficulties and unnecessary hurdles", Manmohan said that the UPA should stay in power long enough to make a visible impact.

"We have begun well. We have given an enviable start despite the difficulties and unnecessary hurdles raised by our opponents. The important thing is to keep to this course," he said while addressing the Congress plenary session.

He also offered some encouragement by saying that the country's farmers, workers, weavers, labourers, and minorities like dalits and tribals, have a very bright future.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) gestures as he speaks with Chief Minister of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy during the final day of the 82nd Indian National Congress Party Plenary meeting at the Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad yesterday.

Rahul rejects calls to take key party role

REUTERS, Hyderabad

Rahul Gandhi, the new star of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty and son of the ruling Congress party chief, rejected yesterday calls for him to shoulder more responsibilities, saying he still had to learn the ropes of politics.

There has been a growing clamour within the Congress to appoint Rahul, 35, to the party's apex decision-making panel, or a general secretary during a three-day party convention in Hyderabad.

But the first-time member of parliament said he was not yet ready.

"Someone once asked me what my religion was. I thought about it and answered, the Indian flag was my religion," Rahul, son of Sonia Gandhi, said in his speech at the convention.

"By taking up a job before I know what our workers and people feel I would be doing a disservice both to my religion and to my party," he said.

"My place right now is among our people, my place right now is to learn and to understand so I can serve my people and my party better," he said.

Fatah keeps lead as campaign concludes

AFP, Ramallah

The ruling Fatah party kept its lead over Hamas in a poll yesterday, the last day of the Palestinian election campaign whose outcome promises to have a profound impact on the Middle East peace process.

Fatah faces an unprecedented threat to its long hold on power from the Islamist movement Hamas when voters head to the polls on Wednesday in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

The possibility of a Hamas victory, or a strong enough showing to enable it to push for a cabinet seat, has led Israel to warn that the peace process will remain frozen and international players that they will struggle to continue dealing with the Palestinian Authority.

However, a poll conducted by the West Bank's An-Najah university found that while the gap between the two parties is narrowing, Fatah should still win 42 per-

cent of votes against 34 percent for Hamas, with three smaller parties holding the balance of power.

Hundreds of foreign observers, including former US president Jimmy Carter, will oversee a vote, which had at one stage threatened to be marred by violence.

Around 1.34 million Palestinians will be entitled to cast their vote in what is only the second ever parliamentary election, electing 132 deputies to the Ramallah-based legislative council.

Fatah was expected to concentrate its last push for votes in its West Bank stronghold, staging rallies in the main cities such as Nablus and Hebron.

Hamas was to wheel out its big guns, such as chief candidate Ismail Haniya, in rallies in its Gaza Strip power base.

Fatah's campaign chief Nabil Shaath admitted the movement's dominance faces a major threat from Hamas, which boycotted the only other election a decade ago.

Lawmakers urge US admn to raise terror alert level

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers on Sunday urged the US administration to raise the domestic terror alert level, following new threats by al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

"I've just written to Michael Chertoff, the head of the Department of Homeland Security, urging that he focus on whether we need to raise our threat level," Representative Jane Harman, top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, told ABC television.

The US intelligence community, Harman said, has assessed the threat in bin Laden's new message and "takes it seriously."

The United States last week rejected a truce offer from al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, and despite a threat of more attacks, authorities said they will not raise the national alert level.

In an audiotape broadcast by the Al-Jazeera Arabic television network, bin Laden warned that attacks on the "heartland" of the United States were being prepared.

Pak HR group reports abuses in Baluchistan

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's top rights group on Sunday accused President Pervez Musharraf's military-led government of "gross human rights violations" in Baluchistan province, where it said a "war-like situation" prevailed.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) also rejected government claims that it was not using regular armed forces in a crackdown in the southwestern province launched last month after rocket attacks by tribal militants battling for greater autonomy and control of lucrative natural gas fields.

The group said it had "received evidence that action by armed forces had led to deaths and injuries among civilians" and that "populations had also been subjected to indiscriminate bombing".

The HRCP report said up to 85 percent the 22,000-25,000 inhabitants of Dera Bugti had fled their homes after the town was repeat-

edly hit by shelling by paramilitary forces.

"There were alarming accounts of summary executions, some allegedly carried out by paramilitary forces. HRCP received credible evidence that showed such killings had taken place," it said.

"Across Baluchistan, the HRCP team found widespread instances of 'disappearance', of torture inflicted on people held in custody, and on those fleeing from their homes," it added.

However HRCP chair Asma Jahangir told a news conference that interviews with local people had not provided evidence to prove a claim by Baluch opposition politicians that the military had used poison gas.

"The security forces, as well as the decision-makers, have remained completely unaccountable for the gross human rights violations in the province, including responsibility for the internally displaced people," the report said.