

## Lanka extends state of emergency

Tamils boycott assembly session, Marxists demand fresh peace process

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's parliament yesterday extended a state of emergency for one month, saying the country's security situation did not allow an easing of the tough anti-terror laws.

Minority Tamil legislators kept up a boycott of the assembly as the government sought the extension of the emergency it declared on August 13, a day after then foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was assassinated.

"We are also not happy with the emergency, but we need it because of the security situation" government's chief peace negotiator Nimal Siripala de Silva told parliament. "When the situation returns to normal, we will revoke it."

Legislators from the minority Tamil National Alliance (TNA)

stayed away from the national parliament in protest at what they say is the harassment of civilians.

The TNA, a proxy of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, blocked parliamentary sessions last month as part of protests they began after their senior MP, Joseph Pararajasingham, was shot dead by an unidentified gunman during a Christmas service at a church in eastern Sri Lanka.

The TNA, which has 22 members in parliament, also opposes search operations carried out by security forces under emergency laws.

Sri Lanka's main Marxist party, a key member of the ruling coalition, yesterday demanded a brand-new peace process to replace the Norwegian-led initiative, which it said had failed.

The JVP, or People's Liberation Front, said President Mahinda Rajapakse should adopt a "fresh approach" to negotiating peace with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

"This is a new beginning," the JVP said in a three-page statement. "This is not a continuation of the failed peace process in the past."

The hardline nationalistic JVP, which strongly backed Rajapakse at his election bid in November, has been highly critical of peace broker Norway and wanted to kick Norwegians off a truce monitoring panel as well.

The JVP's latest statement did not say who should replace the peace broker, but maintained there should be a new initiative.

## Pak protesters storm diplomatic enclave

AP, AFP, Lahore

More than 1,000 protesters stormed into Islamabad's diplomatic district while thousands vandalized Western businesses and torched a government building in another city yesterday, in Pakistan's worst wave of violence against cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM), officials said. At least two people were killed.

Police fired into the air as they tried to disperse a rampaging crowd that burned down four buildings housing two banks, a KFC restaurant and offices of the Norwegian mobile phone company Telenor in the eastern city of Lahore, witnesses said.

Police earlier fired tear gas and used water cannon to disperse hundreds of students who stormed into a high security diplomatic enclave in the capital Islamabad and headed for the British, French and Indian embassies.

Small scale protests against the cartoons have been held almost daily in Pakistan since the furore over the Danish cartoons erupted late this month, but the demonstrations have turned more angry in the

past few days.

"The gunman of the Metropolitan bank opened fire and two people died. It is a serious development. We are grieved over the loss of precious life," Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao told private GEO television.

Police in Lahore confirmed the deaths, with city police chief Omar Bhatti telling AFP several others were "wounded in stone throwing".

Clouds of tear gas and smoke hung over the historic but sprawling city of seven million late Tuesday as rioters burned dozens of cars, motorbikes, tyres and some buildings.

Paramilitary troops were sent in to restore order but several separate demonstrations were continuing and protesters were running wild past still-flaming vehicles, witnesses said.

The stick-wielding protesters attacked and damaged two McDonald's restaurants and a Pizza Hut, before pelting the Holiday Inn hotel and some government buildings with stones.

"One McDonald outlet was completely smashed," police chief Bhatti said.



Pakistani female legislators hold a placard as they stage a silent five-minute protest at the entrance of the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad yesterday. The crowd of lawmakers held their protest after police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse some 3,000 students from several colleges who staged rallies at several places in the city against cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM).

PHOTO: AFP



Former Nepalese prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (L) greets his party cadres who congratulate him following his release from prison in Kathmandu yesterday. Sher Bahadur Deuba was released from prison early yesterday, hours after the Supreme Court dissolved the royal anti-corruption body that jailed him.

## NLD's conditional offer to recognise military rule

REUTERS, Yangon

Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party has offered to recognise Myanmar's military rule if the generals running the country free its leader and summon a parliament whose election in 1990 they ignored.

The proposal would allow the generals to become a legally accepted transitional government while talks are held on moving the former Burma to democracy, the National League for Democracy (NLD) said.

There was no immediate response and acceptance appeared unlikely after the generals who have ruled Myanmar in various guises since 1962 extended the house arrest of a top Suu Kyi aide by another year and railed against foreign critics.

"The SPDC needs to convene a people's parliament with the representatives-elect of the 1990 election," the NLD said in proposals sent to foreign news agencies on Tuesday and referring to the ruling

State Peace and Development Council.

"Then, that parliament will have to declare the State Peace and Development Council de jure," it said in proposals first read out at a party gathering on Sunday.

"Only a people's parliament is vested with the power to declare it so," it said.

The party said the proposal, which would remain on the table until April 17, will enable the SPDC to act as a transitional government until the emergence of a parliamentary government formed with representatives elected by the people.

If a mediator were needed, a head of state from the 10-strong Association of South East Asian Nations, one of the few international groupings, which will have Myanmar as a member, could be chosen, it added.

But, the NLD statement said, Suu Kyi would have to be freed from house arrest to take part in talks on political reform.

## BJP endorses govt's vote against Iran

PTI, New Delhi

Toeing the RSS line, the main opposition BJP yesterday virtually endorsed the government's vote against Iran at the IAEA meeting.

Supporting government's stand on Iran BJP said it was not in India's interest to have another nuclear neighbour in its vicinity.

But the party attacked the government for the "impression" that it has surrendered its sovereign rights to take decisions on key issues and "permitted to be hustled and pressurised into voting in a particular manner".

A statement after a meeting of the BJP Parliamentary Party executive, chaired by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, which discussed the issue, stopped short of coming out in open support of the Indian vote at IAEA saying it was not in India's interests to see Iran acquiring nuclear weapons.

"India can clearly neither ignore, nor minimise the strategic implications and adverse consequences of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. It was therefore patently in India's interests to have been in the forefront of that vast majority of the international community questioning the many clandestine devices through which nuclear technology and material have been transferred to Iran from Pakistan and several other countries."

## Hamas assails US over regime change report

AP, Jerusalem

Hamas derided the United States and Israel yesterday following reports they were exploring ways to topple the militants' incoming government.

US Embassy spokesman Stewart Tuttle had no immediate comment.

Israeli security officials said they were looking at ways to force Hamas from power, and were focusing on an economic squeeze that would prompt Palestinians to clamour for the return of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas' ousted Fatah Party. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

But Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said, "There is no such plan."

The New York Times, citing anonymous US and Israeli officials, reported Tuesday that the United States and Israel were considering a campaign to

starve the Palestinian Authority of cash so Palestinians would grow disillusioned with Hamas and bring down a Hamas government.

The reports came a day after the outgoing Fatah parliament gave sweeping new powers to Abbas, allowing him to set up a sympathetic court that would be able to veto Hamas legislation unchallenged.

Mushir al Masri, a Hamas spokesman and incoming legislator, said attempts to bring down a future Hamas government were hypocritical.

"This is ... a rejection of the democratic process, which the Americans are calling for day and night," al Masri said. "It's an interference and a collective punishment of our people because they practiced the democratic process in a trans-

parent and honest way."

"We need a firm Islamic and Arabic position to confront this challenge," al Masri added.

The idea of withholding aid is not new. Since Hamas' electoral victory, the West has been threatening to cut nearly \$1 billion in annual aid to the Palestinians, though Russia's recent invitation to Hamas to visit Moscow, and France's support for the Russian approach, have cracked what was a united front.

Israel has also threatened to cut off monthly transfers to the Palestinians of about \$50 million from taxes and customs it collects for them, once Hamas takes power.

The new Palestinian parliament is to convene for its first session on Saturday, and a new Cabinet is expected to be appointed within weeks.

## MANMOHAN SAYS Peace top priority of foreign policy

PTI, New Delhi

Facing a stiff attack from the Left over Iran policy, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Tuesday asserted that the Government's "tactics and strategy" may "change with time" in tune with the "changing reality of an ever-changing world".

Days ahead of the discussion in Parliament on India's stance on Iran's nuclear issue, he emphasised, however, that the UPA government's "values" in terms of its policies are "universal and will remain true for all time" and dismissed the perception that it had given up the ideals of non-alignment.

"We have worked hard to create the space needed to have the freedom to make policy choices in an increasingly inter-dependent world," Singh said after laying foundation stone for the External Affairs Ministry's building complex named after Jawaharlal Nehru.

"The means we adopt to pursue

our enduring objectives of peace, national security and development will, of course, change from time to time. They will have to be evolved in response to the changing reality of an ever-changing world," he underlined.

"While the instruments of our policy and the tactics and strategy we adopt may change with time, the values in which they are embedded are universal and will remain true for all time," he said.

Referring to Nehru's "idea" of non-alignment, he said it was based on the "principle that we were not aligned with anyone against anyone but only with our values and national interest."

Stressing that non-alignment was neither an "empty slogan nor a pretext to shirk the responsibility to define our own world view based on our national interest," the Prime Minister said, "indeed, non-alignment was an expression of our enlightened national interest and continues to be so even today."

## Taliban vows to step up attacks in Kabul

Bomb kills 4 GIs

REUTERS, Spin Boldak

Afghanistan's Taliban guerrillas are gaining strength and will step up attacks against government and foreign troops when spring comes next month, a Taliban commander said yesterday.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for a blast on Monday that the US military said killed four troops.

The Taliban said nine Americans were killed and US forces were helpless in the face of such attacks.

The soldiers died on Monday in Uruzgan province, one of the hotbeds of an insurgency launched by the Taliban after they were removed from government in a US-led operation four years ago.

An exchange of small arm and rocket-propelled grenade fire erupted after the explosion, and the

coalition called in helicopters and planes to help the US and Afghan forces on the ground, a coalition statement said.

"Taliban attacks will further increase with a decrease in the winter cold," a former Taliban governor of Kandahar province, Mullah Mohammad Hassan Rahmani, told the agency by satellite telephone from an undisclosed location.

Fighting in Afghanistan traditionally eases off during the winter when mountain passes get snowed under.

But violence has surged in recent months, including 15 suicide blasts since November, as Nato members led by Britain, Canada and the Netherlands prepare to expand their peacekeeping mission.