

# Talks will decide war or peace, says LTTE

REUTERS, Kilinochchi

Talks between Sri Lanka and Tamil Tigers next week will determine if there is peace or war, the rebels said, branding President Mahinda Rajapakse's refusal to consider a separate Tamil homeland as "childish".

Suspected rebel attacks in December and January all but destroyed a Norway-brokered 2002 ceasefire, but violence fell after the two sides agreed to meet in Switzerland. The rebels said that did not mean the country was further from a return to a two-decade civil war.

"That is totally dependent on the outcome of this meeting," S.P. Thamilselvan, head of the political wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), told Reuters in an interview late on Wednesday.

He said the talks would centre

on implementing the terms of the truce.

"It's very unfortunate that we have to go back four years and again speak of implementation. Frustration, restlessness, anger, all are there. But we are people who believe in the use of political civilisation."

Asked if the talks would decide if Sri Lanka was headed towards peace or war, he said: "Yes."

The LTTE delegation will leave on Friday ahead of the two-day talks the following week -- the first high-level talks since direct negotiations broke down in 2003.

Thamilselvan again denied any direct LTTE involvement in ambushes on troops in government held-areas that killed dozens of soldiers and sailors in January and December, saying angry Tamil civilian groups outside rebel control carried them out.

Few analysts or diplomats believe them, and some still expect a return to a war that killed more than 64,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands from their homes.

On Monday, Rajapakse told Reuters a separate homeland or a separate state for the island's Tamil minority was out of the question. The rebels were not happy.

"Mahinda Rajapakse's statement seems to us very childish and not with the ground reality," Thamilselvan said through an interpreter in the de facto rebel capital, Kilinochchi, from which they run roughly a seventh of Sri Lanka.

"We don't believe that that kind of childish statement will help resolve a conflict of this nature."

In Kilinochchi, a small town that has grown in four years of peace but which still bears scars from aerial bombing, many rebel sup-

porters say a separate state is vital.

But Thamilselvan was less precise over whether an eventual homeland in the Tamil-dominated north must be a country in its own right.

"Any solution to the Tamil national problem should involve the concept of a Tamil homeland, nationhood and the right of self determination and provide the people with a dignified solution," he said.

"If all those elements are implemented, then we can address the question of whether it is a separate state or a devolved concept."

But a long-term solution to Sri Lanka's war will not be on the table at the talks, which will concentrate on making the truce work, and diplomats say the best likely outcome is simply the two sides agreeing to meet again.



Pakistani Muslim activists burn an effigy of Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen during a protest rally in Karachi yesterday. Thousands of Pakistanis staged new protests against cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammed (SM) Thursday as officials blamed extremists for earlier riots that targeted Western firms and left five people dead.

## 'Hidden hands' blamed for Pak riots

AFP, Karachi

Thousands of Pakistanis staged new protests over cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammed (SM) yesterday as officials blamed extremists for riots that have targeted Western firms and left five people dead.

President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said "antisocial and criminal elements" were exploiting the demonstrations, which have begun to take an explicitly anti-US tone in Pakistan.

More than 20,000 people were estimated to have joined a rally called by religious parties in Karachi, Pakistan's largest and most volatile city, shouting: "Oh Prophet, we are your servants. We are here to sacrifice our life to preserve your honour."

Paramilitary troops were deployed to protect branches of KFC, McDonald's and other Western fast food chains while residents said the main branch of US-based Citibank hid its logo under a black cloth.



Visiting Afghan President Hamid Karzai (L) talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz during a meeting at the prime minister's residence in Islamabad yesterday. Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed Wednesday to redouble efforts against the "evil" of terrorism, with President Pervez Musharraf insisting Pakistan was doing more than most countries in the fight.

## Karzai urges Pakistan to hunt down militants

REUTERS, Islamabad

Afghan President Hamid Karzai called on Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf during talks on Wednesday to intensify efforts to root out terrorism.

Although the two neighbours are allies of the United States in its war against terrorism, Afghanistan has a lingering distrust of Pakistan because of Islamabad's support for the Taliban when they were in power in Kabul.

Pakistan has had tens of thousands of soldiers battling foreign al-Qaeda-linked militants on its porous border with Afghanistan, but Afghan officials say Taliban militants in Pakistan have not been tackled with equal vigour.

"There are areas in which we seek more cooperation from Pakistan," Karzai told a joint news conference with Musharraf.

Karzai said his talks with Musharraf had been fruitful and that both countries were affected by militant violence.

"But our feeling is that Afghanistan gets hurt much more

by terrorism," he said.

Afghanistan has been hit by a spate of suicide bombings in the past few months and many Afghans believe the bombers came from Pakistan.

Despite Pakistani denials Afghan insurgents were getting any help on the Pakistani side of the border, Karzai said Afghanistan was calling for a "more intensive pursuit of terrorists wherever they may be".

Musharraf said terrorism was the common enemy of the two countries.

"We have to fight them jointly and we have to trust each other that we are fighting them jointly," said Musharraf.

The Taliban and their militant allies have been fighting US and Afghan government forces since they were ousted by US-led forces in late 2001 for harbouring al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Earlier on Wednesday, in a goodwill gesture at the start of Karzai's visit Pakistan freed 562 Afghans who had been detained for visa violations.

## UN asks Nepali Maoists to honour HR promises

### US calls for reconciliation

AFP, Kathmandu

A UN body called on Nepal's Maoist rebel movement yesterday to ensure its members honour promises by the guerrilla leadership to respect human rights.

"The leadership ... has made further commitments to us and to others that they will observe international humanitarian law and respect human rights," said the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights.

"But they have to ensure that their cadres respect in practice pledges made," the UN body said in a statement.

A report released by the UN group said killings and disappearances fell during a four-month unilateral Maoist ceasefire that ended in early January.

Nepal is in crisis and the only way forward is for political parties to

reconcile with the royal government and unite against Maoist rebels, the US ambassador to Nepal said Wednesday.

"This country is in a genuine crisis and reconciliation and compromise is the only way forward," Ambassador James F Moriarty told journalists.

"The US views the uneasy partnership between the parties and the Maoists as wrongheaded," he said. "We believe cooperation along current lines is fraught with danger, for the political parties themselves and for the future of the Nepalese people."

The United States classifies the Maoists as a terrorist group and believes the rebels are using the parties as a piggyback to power. It says they are not committed to peace and democracy.

"There is certainly no way for the parties or the king to successfully ride the

Maoist tiger for their own advantage. One could easily fall off ... and tigers get hungry," said the ambassador.

Last week's municipal elections staged by the royal government were a "hollow exercise" because political parties boycotted them and the polls were held under the threat of Maoist violence, Moriarty said.

Pro-royal candidates swept the posts and voter turnout was just 21 percent.

Moriarty also said that royal rule "has clearly been unsuccessful".

In recent interviews, Maoist leaders have said politics and violence will continue to go hand-in-hand in their campaign to topple the monarchy.

Maoist chief Prachanda, whose name means "the fierce one," predicted in a recent BBC interview that within five years, Nepal's king would either have been executed by a "people's court" or have fled into exile.

## Chirac orders 'toxic' warship back to France

REUTERS, Paris

President Jacques Chirac on Wednesday ordered home an asbestos-laden warship after Indian authorities blocked its journey to an Indian scrapyard, days before a visit to New Delhi overshadowed by the legal wrangle.

Chirac ordered the retired aircraft carrier Clemenceau back to France pending a final decision on how to dispose of the 27,000-tonne ship.

He demanded a fresh audit of the amount of deadly asbestos on board, after a 30-tonne discrepancy emerged between the amount of asbestos said to have been taken off the Clemenceau and the amount weighed by disposal teams.

"The president has decided to put this ship in French waters, on a position of standby which offers all security guarantees, until a definitive solution for its dismantling is found," Chirac's Elysee Palace said in a statement.

India's Supreme Court has already banned the Clemenceau from entering the country's territorial waters, pending a final decision on whether the asbestos represents a health hazard to Indian scrapyard workers.

## HR groups urge donors to press Bhutan on refugees

REUTERS, Guwahati

An alliance of Bhutanese rights groups urged donor nations to press Bhutan's government at a two-day meeting beginning Wednesday to take back refugees from camps in Nepal.

The Druk Human Rights Forum said the donor meeting in Geneva should seek commitments from the tiny Himalayan kingdom on the refugee crisis before agreeing to continue assistance as refugees too were eligible for donor funds.

"We want donor nations to be firm so that Bhutan stops playing with refugees and hoodwinking the international community on this issue," Thinley Penjore, head of the forum, told Reuters by phone from Nepal.

In the early 1990s, the king of Bhutan stripped hundreds of ethnic Nepalis of their citizenship and threw them out of the country after they complained of racial discrimination and campaigned for democracy.