# INTERNATIONAL

# Lanka navy, air force sink LTTE boats

#### Troops kill 7 civilians in Jaffna

REUTERS, AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's navy and air force sank two Tamil Tiger rebel boats in battle vesterday, officials said, further straining a battered 2002 ceasefire and possibly putting peace talks further out of reach.

More than 200 people have died in violence over the past month, raising fears a two decade civil war might resume. Both sides say they want talks, but until thorny logistical issues are solved, most analysts expect violence to worsen.

Naval sources said patrol boats were fired on by apparent Sea Tiger craft off the northwestern Mannar district. The navy returned fire and a suspected Tiger suicide boat exploded. Naval sources said they then called for air support.

"There were two (rebel) boats. One was destroyed by the navy, one was destroyed by the air force," the

secretariat Palitha Kohona told Reuters. "The people who got out of the second boat are now on land, and are being engaged by ground

The air attack was the first of its kind in more than a week. The government launched two days of strikes on rebel positions in the northeast last week after a suicide attack on army headquarters in

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, whose fight for a Tamil homeland has killed more than 64,000 on both sides, had threatened to retaliate if there were any new attacks on them.

The military said it had suffered no casualties in the Mannar incident, but three policemen were wounded in the northern town of Vavuniya after suspected Tigers hurled a grenade at a police vehicle.

In fresh killing, government soldiers shot dead seven civilians in

Rahul Gandhi, son of Sonia Gandhi, president of the Congress Party and Chairperson of the United Progressive

Alliance (UPA) government, talks with supporters yesterday during election campaign for the by-polls scheduled to

take place in Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareli constituency on May 8. The 59-year-old leader, Sonia Gandhi quit her post in

Maoists, Nepali govt edge

Parliament held its fifth sitting

Friday since reopening last week

and members discussed punishing

those responsible for human rights

abuses during the protests that left

17 people dead and hundreds more

against those who abused power

during pro democracy protests,"

Home Minister Krishna Prasad

Sitaula told members of the house

about who would be punished or

what actions could be taken against

King Gyanendra's reign of total

power after he sacked the govern-

ment in February 2005, saying that

they were corrupt and had failed to

stem a bloody Maoist insurgency

political parties formed a loose

alliance with the rebels last

Once bitter enemies, the ousted

that has claimed 12.500 lives.

Sitaula gave no further details

The protests brought an end to

'The government will take action

parliament on March 23 to mute opposition charges that she wrongfully held a salaried post.

towards peace talks

injured and jailed.

of representatives.

AFP. Kathmandu

kingdom.

Nepal's new government took a

tentative step towards peace with the

Maoist rebels yesterday after the

militants agreed to take part in talks to

the new cabinet a "code of conduct"

outlining the rules they want to see

followed in the wake of ceasefires

declared by the Maoists and the

government in the Himalayan

code of conduct. Once the govern-

ment reaches an agreement a

committee will be formed to begin

dialogue," Finance Minister Ram

The minister gave no indication

After three weeks of mass pro-

tests by seven opposition parties in

concert with rebel Maoists, Nepal's

King Gyanendra finally handed

back power to parliament last week.

after ruling the country directly for 14

Sharan Mahat told AFP Fridav.

of when peace talks might begin.

"We are studying the Maoist

The rebels said they had given

end their decade-old insurgency.

Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula after a grenade attack wounded three soldiers in the same area, a pro-rebel website reported

The victims were on their way to attend a birthday party Thursday when troops opened fire with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, the Tamilnet website

"They were attacked by the Sri Lanka army men in retaliation to a grenade attack that took place behind their intelligence camp where three personnel, including an officer, were wounded," the Tamilnet

The defence ministry said troops fired at two three-wheel taxis transporting the men when they tried to attack an army sentry point. "A huge explosion inside the

November, isolating King

On Wednesday, the newly rein-

Gyanendra -- the world's sole Hindu

stated government called a

ceasefire, matching that called by

the rebels last week, and urged the

and, with their demand met for a

constituent assembly to draft a new

constitution, agreed to join a peace

The rebels welcomed the move

Despite calling a ceasefire, the

rebels kidnapped three police officers

Wednesday, an officer at police

headquarters in Kathmandu told AFP

balance as the political parties begin

preparations for peace talks with the

(RPP), which has 11 seats in the

205-member parliament and was

formerly seen as royalist, now sees

no place for the king in Nepali poli-

King Gyanendra's future is in the

The Rastriva Praiatantra Party

on condition of anonymity.

rebels, politicians said.

Maoists to enter peace talks.

second three-wheeler caused death to passengers," the ministry said, suggesting they were carrying

#### critics confront Rumsfeld

Hostile war

AP, Atlanta

Already under fire from some retired military brass who want him to resign, Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld was greeted at a speech in Atlanta by unusually hostile anti-war protesters

"This man needs to be in prison for war crimes," shouted Gloria Tatum, 63, of nearby Decatur, Ga., before being hauled away by security officials

Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst and noted critic of the war in Iraq, waited patiently in line to question Rumsfeld, then let loose.

"Why did you lie to get us into a war that caused these kind of casualties and was not necessary?' McGovern said.

"I did not lie," shot back a feisty Rumsfeld, who waved off security quards ready to remove McGovern from the hall at the Southern Centre for International Studies With support for the war in Iraq low, it

is not unusual for top Bush administration officials to encounter protests and hostile questions. But the outbursts Rumsfeld confronted Thursday seemed tougher than usual



Iranian President Mamoud Ahmadinejad (L) shakes hands with Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz prior to a meeting in Baku Thursday. The two leaders, who are in Baku to attend the 9th session of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) Summit, discussed the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project and Iran's nuclear issue during the meeting.

### New Israeli PM looks IAEA still central to solving Iran crisis

#### Says Russian FM

The international community should continue to focus on the (IAEA) in its efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said

"It's necessary to wholly support the continuation of the activities of the IAEA in Iran and I hope that all efforts of the international community, in Vienna and in New York, will be aimed at exactly that," Lavrov told journalists, referring to the host cities of the IAEA and the United Nations Security Council.

"In such an important and serious area as nuclear proliferation we trust only the judgement of professionals," said Lavrov, whose country is one of the Security Council's five permanent

members. IAEA inspections "have not supported the conclusion that Iran possesses technologies for producing weapons of mass destruction...

On the other hand, the inspections

don't support the opposite conclu-"All our proposals today are

aimed at clarifying this question," Lavrov said. He was speaking as the permanent members of the Security Council mulled a binding draft

resolution demanding a halt to Iran's uranium enrichment work. Western powers suspect that what Iran has presented as a civilian nuclear programme is in fact a cover for developing nuclear weapons.

Russia, a close political and commercial ally of Iran, has consistently cautioned against the use of sanctions or force in the Iranian nuclear stand-off.

In New York on Wednesday, Russia's UN ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, said Moscow would be prepared to back a Franco-British draft resolution on Iran if its concerns were addressed Russia is building Iran's first

nuclear power station at Bushehr, a project that Washington has said . Moscow should halt.

#### 3 die in Indian courtroom shootout

AFP, New Delhi

A suspected gangster wanted for 18 cases of murder and looting was among three people killed in a shootout with police in a crowded court, police said yesterday.

"Hardutt Singh, a criminal wanted in 18 cases was to be produced before a court, when three men fired at him," said Hanif Qureshi, senior police officer in Gurgaon town, which borders the capital New Delhi.

"Two of the gunmen were killed by the police when police returned

fire," he said. Police suspected intra-gang rivalry to have sparked the mayhem as Hardut was brought into the

#### Army restores peace in Vadodara

AGENCIES. New Delhi

courtroom for trial.

Curfew has been temporarily lifted for women and children in Although no incidents of fresh

violence have been reported but tension still hangs in the air. The city has been witnessing violence since Monday following

demolition of a dargah.

Troops of the Rapid Action Force are keeping vigil over the city.

The Army has been conducting flag marches in the city.
On Thursday, the Supreme
Court stayed a Gujarat High Court

order directing municipal corporations to demolish shrines obstruct-

#### Suharto's organs are failing Say doctors

Doctors treating former Indonesian dictator Suharto said yesterday that his organs have partly failed, but ongoing blood transfusions have improved his condition slightly.

Suharto, 84, was admitted to Jakarta's Pertamina Hospital late Thursday for intestinal bleeding and received a blood transfusion.

"His condition is slightly better as his hemoglobin has raised from 7.8 to 8.4. but for an old man like him. we cannot say that it is stable especially because the function of some of his organs have decreased by 70 percent," presidential doctor Brig. Gen. Marjo Subiandono said.

# Kashmir closes to protest sex scandal AFP, Srinagar A strike and protests to force the

government to reveal names of people caught up in a prostitution scandal paralysed the summer capital of Indian Kashmir yesterday and injured 20 people. Hundreds of protesters hanging

out of car windows and riding motorbikes drove through Srinagar chantng "Punish the culprits" and "Islam's writ will run in Kashmir."

Thousands of people also attacked the house of a woman accused by neighbours of organising the prostitution ring, set fire to furniture, clothing and appliances and tore down part of the building.

Police last month unearthed the alleged racket involving over 40 women whose clients included politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen in the conservative Muslim-majority state where a separatist revolt is raging.

Religious and separatist leaders along with newspaper editorials have been demanding that the client list be made public along with the names of two women and one man

# to US for backing to redraw borders

Newly installed Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert set his sights Friday on a visit to Washington to win US support for his plan to redraw Israel's borders and leave parts of the West Olmert, whose four-party coali-

However military sources said the soldiers fired an RPG into the

bers of the rebel Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the ministry

Thursday in a grenade attack in the

northern Vavuniya district, police

aunmen stormed the offices of the

pro-LTTE Uthayan newspaper in

Jaffna late Tuesday, killing a man-

hopes talks can take place with the

rebels next week in Geneva, but the

rebels pulled out of talks indefinitely

last month and the two sides cannot

even agree the transport of eastern

rebel leaders to a pre-talks meeting.

ager and another employee.

The latest violence came after

The government says it still

officials said.

Two policemen also died

tion was sworn in late Thursday, will leave for the United States on May 21, making his first overseas trip as Although no official schedule has

been released, the cornerstone of Olmert's visit to Israel's closest ally will be talks with President George W. Bush, to whom he is expected to outline his plan to separate from the Acquiring US and wider interna-

tional support is fundamental to the chances of implementing the hugely ambitious project, which would see 70,000 Jews removed from the West Bank and large settlements effectively annexed to Israel

Olmert has warned he is prepared to implement the project with or without agreement from the

Palestinians, saying no progress in the stalled Middle East process is possible with radical Islamists Hamas in government.

"The point of the visit is to present the government's programme and to enlist the American support that Mr Olmert judges crucial for its implementation," said a senior official in the premier's office.

American support is vital to win an international consensus comparable to that for the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip," which Olmert predecessor and political mentor Ariel Sharon masterminded last year, the official added.

Dov Weisglass, Sharon's senior adviser, who is to stay on the job for at least a few more weeks, has already left for Washington to prepare the ground.

Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas, who flatly opposes any unilateral Israeli moves, telephoned Olmert on Friday to congratulate him on his new government and urge him to resume Middle East

### Hurriyat wants militants to join peace talks

REUTERS, New Delh

Kashmir's main separatist political alliance said on Friday it wanted to invite Islamist militants fighting in the disputed region to join new peace talks with New Delhi.

The comments by Mirwaiz Umar Faroog, chief of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, came two days after the group agreed with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to establish a system to discuss solutions to the Kashmir

Hurriyat is an alliance of nearly two-dozen separatist political

"Well definitely, once this process takes on, once we are able to have a blueprint, the Hurrivat can also try to get them on board ... (using) whatever influence we have," Farooq told Reuters in an

Islamist militants fighting against New Delhi's rule in the Himalayan region since 1989 have in the past shunned India's overtures for talks because of New Delhi's precondition that they must first lay down arms

The militants are also opposed to any compromise over the territorial dispute.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the insurgency so far in the region, which is also at the root of nearly 60 years of enmity between nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan.

Farooq said the militants were not upbeat about the ongoing peace process between the Indian government and Hurriyat on the one hand and between India and Pakistan on a parallel track

"It's a fact that most of them feel nothing is coming out of the process," said Farooq, speaking at a plush New Delhi apartment.

Farooq, who is also the hereditary chief Imam of Kashmir's main mosque, called this week's talks with the Indian prime minister as the first real dialogue between the two

The alliance had held talks with Singh once earlier in September and had also negotiated with the previous Hindu nationalist-led coalition government.



## Video shows Zarqawi fumbling with rifle

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is shown wearing American tennis shoes and unable to operate his automatic rifle in video released by the US military as part of a propaganda war aimed at undercutting the image of the terror leader.

The US command showed the footage to reporters at a time when it is stepping up operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq and making overtures to other Sunni groups. The Americans hope to isolate religious extremists from insurgents they believe are more likely to cut a deal to end the war.

The clips shown Thursday were part of a longer video that US troops seized in a raid last month. al-Qaeda in Iraq militants posted an edited version of the same video on the Internet April 25 but without the leader first firing single shots from a US-made M-249 light machine gun. A frown creeps across al-Zarqawi's face as the weapon jams. He looks at t, confused, then summons another "It's supposed to be automatic fire

He's shooting single shots," Lynch said. "Something is wrong with his machine gun. He looks down, can't figure out, calls his friend to come unblock the stoppage and get the weapon firing again.

By contrast, the edited version which the militants posted on the Web showed what happened only after the fighter fixed the weapon a fierce-looking al-Zarqawi confidently blasting away with bursts of automatic gunfire. His fellow fighters and associ-

ates appear similarly inept in the newly released footage. One reaches out to grab a just-fired weapon by the barrel, apparently unaware that it would burn his hand. The camera quickly pans to the ground and then away.

### faction strikes peace deal

REUTERS, Abuja

The biggest of three rebel factions from Sudan's Darfur region accepted a peace deal with the government vesterday but two other factions rejected it, casting doubt on whether the agreement would be

A faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) led by Minni Arcua Minnawi said it would sign a peace settlement drafted by African Union (AU) mediators after two years of "I accept the document with

some reservations concerning the power sharing," Minnawi told Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick and a host of senior diplomats meeting at

Obasanjo's Abuja compound. A spokesman for Minnawi's faction later said the main reservation was what they saw as insufficient representation in terms of parliamentary seats.

#### Big Darfur rebel | EU to aid Abbas in plan to avert PA collapse that letting it go ahead would take

**REUTERS**, Jerusalem

Kashmiris dismantle the house of an alleged pimp Sabeena in Srinagar yester-

day. A day-long strike to force the government to reveal the names of people

caught up in a sex scandal paralysed Kashmir. Police last month unearthed a

prostitution racket allegedly involving more than 40 young women serving

politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen in the state.

A European Commission proposal to "avert or delay" the Palestinian Authority's collapse calls for pooling donor funds and using President Mahmoud Abbas's office to funnel them to provide basic services, a

Commission document shows. The European Union has frozen direct aid to the Hamas-led Authority, but the April 27 document says the commission intends to provide assistance to bolster Abbas's office in anticipation that it will play the role of go-between.

"With current or even substantially increased levels of funding, the EU will not be able to stave off a crisis but might be able to avert or delay a collapse," the document

Western diplomats say the Bush administration has moved in recent days to scuttle the European proposal on the ground pressure off Hamas to renounce violence, recognise Israel and abide by interim peace deals. But they said the Bush adminis-

tration has agreed to back an expansion of Abbas's elite presidential guard. The EU would provide the funds for training and Hamas officials and some Western diplomats say

Washington's goal is to shore up Abbas while making it impossible for the Palestinian Authority to function. Like proposals floated by Britain and France, the European Commission said donors could

establish a pool of funds in coordination with the United Nations, the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. The money would be funneled

to specific sectors like health and education, bypassing the Hamasled Authority.

man for the US command, mocked

al-Zarqawi as the previously unseen footage showed a smiling al-Qaeda

embarrassing segments.

Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, spokes-

An undated video grab released on the website of the US Department of Defence (DOD) Thursday shows al-Qaeda's

Iraq frontman Abu Musab al-Zarqawi with a masked comrade (L) at an undisclosed location in Iraq.