



PHOTO: AFP

Nepalese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Khadga Prasad Oli (R) shakes hands with Special Adviser to the Under Secretary General for Political Affairs, Tamrat Samuel (C) as UN High Commissioner Human Rights in Nepal Ian Martin (L) looks on after a meeting in Kathmandu yesterday. The week-long visit of Tamrat is a continuation of consultations the UN has maintained to encourage a peaceful resolution of the country's armed conflict and political instability, UN statement said.

UN official in Nepal offers help for peace

AFP, Kathmandu

A senior United Nations diplomat, who is in Nepal to meet political leaders and congratulate them on the restoration of democracy, said Sunday that the UN wanted to help in any peace process.

Tamrat Samuel, a special advisor to the UN undersecretary for political affairs, is in Nepal for 10 days to talk with political leaders who wrested power from the monarchy and began a ceasefire with Maoist rebels last week.

"Nepal has outlined some consensus to manage the conflict and we are looking forward to help, as decided by the government," Samuel told reporters.

KP Sharma Oli, deputy prime minister and foreign minister, however ruled out UN mediation in ending a decade-old insurgency by Maoist rebels.

"We have never asked for UN mediation and I don't think we

need it at the moment," Oli said just after meeting Samuel Sunday.

Samuel, who arrived on Saturday, will "most probably not" meet King Gyanendra, who was forced to hand over power to political parties in late April after weeks of mass street protests, UN spokesman Ram Babu Shah said.

The envoy was scheduled to meet Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Saturday to hand over a letter from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, but the visit was postponed because the 84-year-old premier was ill, Shah said.

The visit comes after rebel Maoists agreed to take part in talks with the interim government on ending the bloody conflict that has seen at least 12,500 people killed.

The Maoists agreed to join the peace process after the government met their demand for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.

Japan moves to save Lankan peace bid

India wary of push for its peace broker role

AFP, REUTERS, Colombo

A senior Japanese envoy began talks with government officials yesterday to try to save Sri Lanka's peace process as Tamil rebels said troops abducted eight men in the island's north.

The men had slept overnight at a Hindu temple after a ceremony in the Jaffna peninsula before troops allegedly took them away, the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said in a statement.

They said villagers found blood and three identity cards belonging to the missing men.

The defence ministry said it had no information about the Tiger allegations but said that in the country's east, troops and Tamil

Tiger rebels traded mortar and automatic rifle fire on Sunday.

"There are no casualties among troops but we don't know if there are any on the other side," the spokesman said, adding that the firefight around the Vavunathivu military base lasted nearly two hours.

The latest attacks came as Japanese envoy Yasushi Akashi met Palitha Kohona, head of the government's peace secretariat which coordinates the Norwegian-backed peace initiative.

Akashi arrived in Colombo late Saturday. He is to meet President Mahinda Rajapakse on Monday, diplomats said.

The LTTE confirmed that the leader of their political wing, S.P. Thamilselvan, would hold discussions with the

Japanese envoy on Tuesday in a rebel-held northern town.

Kohona welcomed Akashi's planned meeting with the senior rebel.

"The government wants Mr. Akashi to go to the north and meet with the LTTE at a time when we are getting ready for the second round of talks with many hiccups," he said.

A Japanese embassy spokesman said Akashi wanted to discuss the state of the peace process with the Tiger leadership.

The visit comes amid stepped-up efforts by the government to seek international pressure to revive talks with the rebels. Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera was visiting neighbouring India to brief it about developments.

Samaraweera arrives in India yesterday, hoping to persuade New Delhi to help broker peace in the island nation, which is teetering on the verge of a fresh civil war.

But India is unlikely to budge from maintaining a diplomatic distance from the ethnic conflict on the island off its southern coast due to disastrous previous experiences and domestic political compulsions, officials and analysts said.

Samaraweera's three-day visit is ostensibly to brief the Indian leadership on the situation in Sri Lanka. But Colombo has also been sending feelers to New Delhi urging it to pressure the Tamil Tiger rebels, Indian officials said.

al-Qaeda appeals for ousting Musharraf

AFP, Miranshah

A leaflet urging Pakistanis to rise against military ruler Pervez Musharraf was distributed in the volatile tribal district near the Afghan border yesterday, residents said.

It came a day after another leaflet, containing statements purportedly from al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, was

distributed in the same region - North Waziristan tribal district - calling for Musharraf's assassination.

Saturday's leaflet sought the support of tribal people to defeat the United States and Pakistani troops battling pro-Taliban insurgents in the tribal regions.

"I pray to Allah almighty to bring down his wrath on Bush, Pervez and

their armies and bestow a chance for someone from the ranks of faithful to kill this slave (Musharraf) of Bush," the purported Bin Laden statement said.

Written in Urdu, it bears the signature "Mujahiden Emirate-e-Islamia Afghanistan" and was distributed in the towns of Mir Ali and Miranshah, residents said.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan soldiers check for explosive devices along a road in Trincomalee, some 260km east of Colombo, on May 5. Since December 2005, suspected Tamil Tiger rebels have exploded dozens of Claymore mines, which often cause multiple casualties not just among the military but also among civilians, the Scandinavian truce monitors say.

Millions to vote in last leg of Indian state polls

AFP, New Delhi

Millions are set to vote today in the final phase of elections to five state assemblies, which are seen as a referendum on the federal government as it approaches two years in power.

The Marxist bastion of West Bengal and the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry go to the polls Monday while voting in northeastern Assam and the southern state of Kerala has been completed.

Results for all five states will be

announced on May 11.

In West Bengal, security has been stepped up after complaints by opposition parties of fraud and intimidation during four previous stages of the staggered elections.

"For tomorrow's vote, federal paramilitary forces will be deployed in all 49 constituencies going to the polls," said Raj Kanojia, state police chief.

More than eight million people are eligible to vote for 306 candidates in the state, where a communist government has been in power since 1977.