



Former Khmer Rouge chief Ta Mok dies at 80

AFP, Phnom Penh

Former Khmer Rouge leader Ta Mok, known as "The Butcher" for his extreme brutality, died Friday aged 80 before he could be put on trial for the genocide of up to two million Cambodians.

The once-feared Ta Mok, one of only two former top Khmer Rouge leaders awaiting prosecution over one of 20th century's most appalling episodes, was admitted to hospital last month with breathing problems.

"Ta Mok passed away at 04:45 am (2145 GMT Thursday). We feel very sad for his death but what can we do," his lawyer Benson Samay said, adding that he had slipped into unconsciousness before he died.

After years of infighting and bloody purges, military commander Ta Mok briefly became the communist Khmer Rouge's last leader before the movement disintegrated in 1998.

US, UK singled out for blocking ME truce

Bush admn encouraging Israeli offensive, says Lebanon PM

AFP, Paris/ Beirut

French Defence Minister Michele Alliot-Marie yesterday accused the United States and Britain of blocking a United Nations call for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East.

"The United States doesn't want to arrive at this solution immediately," she told French radio RMC Info.

"And that's what is now blocking the workings of the United Nations Security Council."

"At the moment the Israelis evidently want to neutralise Hezbollah. That's why there are strong reticences (about agreeing to a ceasefire)," the minister concluded.

Asked whether Washington was deliberately allowing Israel to pursue its offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon, Alliot-Marie replied: "There is no doubt an element of that in the analysis one can make of their position."

The French minister said it was essential "to put pressure on those involved in this crisis... (because) it is vital for combat to cease as soon

as possible".

Washington and London have so far refused to join other nations in demanding that Israel end its aerial bombardment on Lebanon and in the Gaza Strip, where 106 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have died on a separate front.

In Britain, which has been accused of slavishly following the United States in foreign policy matters, the liberal Independent newspaper claimed both countries were now increasingly "exposed" by their entrenched position.

In a large graphic, it showed the flags of 179 countries which backed UN ceasefire proposals on one half of the front page, with only the British, US and Israeli flags on the other.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora said on Thursday that there was no apparent political settlement to end hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, and accused the United States of encouraging Israel's offensive on Lebanon.

"The United States is allowing Israel to pursue its aggression," he told AFP.

Siniora said the UN delegation in charge of negotiating a ceasefire did not return to Lebanon from Israel because the Jewish state gave a "negative response" to ideas put forward for a halt to hostilities during a visit in Beirut on Monday.

"The Israelis are rejecting a ceasefire to continue to exert pressure in order to reach their objectives," he said, without elaborating.

United Nations chief Kofi Annan led a volley of international calls Thursday for a ceasefire in Lebanon, warning that a humanitarian crisis was in the making.

"What is urgently needed is an immediate cessation of hostilities," Annan said in a briefing of the UN Security Council on the ninth day of Israeli strikes on its northern neighbour.

"Both the deliberate targeting by Hezbollah of Israeli population centres with hundreds of indiscriminate weapons and Israel's disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the Lebanese people must stop."

Annan demanded an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah and proposed a blueprint to end the warfare in Lebanon.

But US ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, voiced scepticism.

"We seek a long-term cessation of hostilities that is part of a comprehensive change in the region and part of a real foundation for peace," he said. "But no one has explained how you conduct a ceasefire with a group of terrorists," he said, referring to Hezbollah.

Israel on Friday conditioned a halt to fighting in Lebanon on the disarmament and dismantling of Hezbollah as a military force.

In addition, more than half a million people have been forced to abandon their homes, while thousands of foreigners are being urgently evacuated from Lebanon.

Pope Benedict XVI called for prayers "for an immediate ceasefire between the parties, the immediate installation of humanitarian corridors to allow aid to be brought to the suffering populations", the Vatican said.



A young Lebanese woman looks from a hole in the wall of her building in the southern village of Saksakieh after it was hit by an Israeli air raid yesterday. Israel launched a wave of air strikes on southern Lebanon after issuing a new warning to residents to flee the area, which has repeatedly been bombed during the 10-day offensive.



A refugee family arrives at Minsk airport yesterday from Damascus airport after fleeing war-torn Beirut with another 170 Belarus citizens.

Thousands of Lebanon evacuees flood into Cyprus

REUTERS, Limassol

Thousands of tired, frightened evacuees fleeing Israel's bombardment of Lebanon flooded into Cyprus yesterday, sparking warnings by officials that the small island may not be able to cope with the influx.

Around 1,000 Americans, visibly relieved to have escaped the relentless aerial bombing, disembarked overnight in the port of Larnaca from USS Nashville after being rescued by US Marines.

About the same number arrived at the port of Limassol on a cruise liner chartered by the US government.

"They (the Israelis) are targeting civilians. They call themselves civilized, but they are barbaric. I don't want my kid to grow up like that," said Habib Kheil, a professor of mathematics from Michigan.

"We arrived two days before (the bombardment) started. The chil-

dren were so scared, they huddled all together and stayed in the lowest part of the house," he said, breaking into sobs and hugging his eight-year-old son Abdul.

Dutchwoman Amna Choucair, a 30-year-old mother of two who has lived in Lebanon for 10 years, said she still hoped to return to her adopted home.

"We left everything behind... It is such a waste. Hopefully we will be back soon. The kids have a life there."

US officials said they had arranged six charter flights to carry Americans from Cyprus to Baltimore free of charge. They expect to have evacuated 6,000 Americans from Lebanon by Friday.

Cypriot Foreign Minister Georgios Lillikas said his country, with a population of just under a million, was struggling to deal with the crisis and he repeated his call to Nicosia's European Union partners to help share the burden.

Asia calls for intervention, mulls sending troops

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia and Malaysia said they could send troops as part of a UN deployment to the Middle East as Asia showed mounting concern yesterday and urged the international community to intervene.

With the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon well into its second week, countries in the region warned of spiralling violence if world powers failed to check the current conflict.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono wrote to UN General Secretary Kofi Annan to express concern over the conflict and pledge Jakarta's readiness to contribute to a possible UN force there, his spokesman said.

"The president expressed support for the formation of an international force under a UN mandate and Indonesia is willing to participate in such a force by contributing at least a battalion," spokesman Dino Patti Djalal said.

The letter followed his call Tuesday for a ceasefire between Israel and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah militia, whose capture of two Israeli soldiers 10 days ago triggered the violence.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, has no diplomatic ties with Israel.

More than a week of Israeli airstrikes and incursions into Lebanon have left more than 330 dead in Lebanon and hundreds of thousands had fled their homes fearing that the Jewish state could mount a full-scale ground offensive.

Annan has called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for an expanded contingent of peace-keeping troops to be deployed in the region.

G8 leaders -- from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Russia and the United States -- have also proposed an international stabilisation force for

Lebanon, where the UN currently has a 2,000-strong contingent.

Muslim-majority Malaysia said it was also considering sending troops, pending UN Security Council approval.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak said that Malaysia, the current chair of the world's largest grouping of Islamic countries, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, was well placed to send soldiers.

Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar added: "The international community... should make every effort to ensure that these aggressive military actions by Israel do not lead to a widening of the conflict involving other countries."

"It is no good for the United Nations to say they are concerned about the humanitarian catastrophe. What are they doing about the humanitarian catastrophe? That is important," he said.

Nepali peace talks postponed

UN team to visit for arms monitoring assessment

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A meeting between Nepal's top Maoist leaders and seven political parties set for Friday has been postponed, delaying a slow-moving peace dialogue aimed at ending a bloody, decade-old revolt, officials said.

Maoist chief Prachanda's meeting with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and other leaders was expected to discuss the tricky issue of arms monitoring to clear the way for the rebels to join an interim government under a power sharing deal struck in June.

"The meeting will not take place on Friday as scheduled because preparations are not complete yet," Tourism Minister Pradip Gyanwali, a government negotiator, said on Thursday.

A Maoist negotiator said a fresh date has not been fixed but the meeting could happen as early as

next week.

The postponement comes ahead of a visit by a UN team next week to assess how to monitor arms held by government forces and Maoists rebels as they move towards peace.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Khadga Prasad Oli told Reuters: "This will include the monitoring and disarmament of the Maoists."

"The UN will also ensure that the government army remains inside the barracks and is not used to influence the elections."

The Maoists -- whose decade-long fight for a communist state has left over 13,000 dead - declared a ceasefire in April after King Gyanendra bowed to weeks of protests and ended his absolute rule, handing power to an interim multi-party government.

The government coalition agreed to include the Maoists in an

interim cabinet, which would oversee elections in 2007 for an assembly to be charged with mapping out a new constitution.

However, the rebels have refused to surrender their arms and want their force of some 36,000 fighters to merge with state troops after the vote.

"We are strongly opposed to the decommissioning of our army alone," rebel spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara said.

Mahara said the guerrillas were ready to stay in camps with their arms and be supervised by the United Nations, only if government forces also remained in their barracks under the same conditions.

Monitoring arms is seen as crucial to a free and fair vote as the guerrillas control large swathes of the Himalayan nation and are known to enforce their writ through threats.

4 Palestinians killed in Gaza explosion

AP, Gaza City

A Hamas activist and three relatives were killed yesterday in an explosion at his home in Gaza City, hospital officials said. Palestinians said the house was hit by an Israeli tank shell.

The Israeli military said it fired in the area but denied using artillery or tanks. The house is near the Karni cargo crossing between Israel and Gaza, where Israeli tanks and troops have been massing during a three-week offensive, sometimes entering the territory.

The house belonged to Hamas activist Mohammed Harara, 26, who was killed, said relatives who saw the bodies at Gaza's Shifa Hospital. Also killed were his mother and two of his brothers, both in their 20s, said Gaza Hospital spokesman Dr. Jumah Sakah. A fifth person was initially thought to have been killed but hospital officials said that was a mistake.

On Thursday, the Israeli army dropped Arabic-language leaflets over Gaza City, warning that houses were potential targets. Israeli forces have mostly attacked government

compounds and open areas where militants fire rockets at Israel.

Israeli air and ground forces also raided a Gaza refugee camp for a second day, killing three Palestinians.

The Israeli offensive began after Hamas-linked militants captured an Israeli soldier in a June 25 cross-border raid.

More than 100 Palestinians have been killed, the UN reported. Many of the victims were gunmen, but at least 16 were minors. Israeli forces have mostly attacked government compounds and open areas militants use to fire rockets toward Israel.

The offensive has continued even as Israel wages a new campaign in Lebanon against Hezbollah, which began July 12 after guerrillas crossed the border and captured two soldiers.

On Thursday, Israeli aircraft carried out a series of strikes against Palestinian militants in the Mughazi refugee camp in central Gaza, the army said. Two militants were killed and at least 15 people, many of them civilians, were wounded, Palestinian medical officials said.



Palestinians salvage what they can from a sewing factory, which was completely flattened by the Israeli army during a two day military operation on the Maghazi Palestinian refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. The operation left 15 Palestinians killed, mainly civilians and over 100 injured including several children.

Experts warn of Asia's 'hidden cancer' risk

AFP, Bangkok

Asian women must not ignore the danger of cervical cancer, experts told a Bangkok conference yesterday, labelling it a "hidden cancer" that kills more women in Asia than anywhere else in the world.

Jatupol Srisomboon, chairman of Chiang Mai university's gynecologic and oncology department, said that of the 500,000 cases of cervical cancer diagnosed worldwide each year, 266,000 are in the Asia-Pacific.

The region also accounts for more than half the world's deaths from the disease, with 143,000 dying every year out of a total global fatality rate of 270,000, he said.

"It is the region's hidden cancer," he told the conference. "Every woman is at risk. Cervical cancer affects women in the prime of their life."

In Thailand, there are 6,243 cases of the disease diagnosed each year, with 42 percent of sufferers dying.



Former Sri Lankan prime minister and leader of the opposition Ranil Wickremesinghe (L) talks with India's leader of the opposition Lal Krishna Advani at his residence in New Delhi yesterday. Wickremesinghe is in India on a two-day visit.

Pak tribal militants hold talks to broker peace deal

AFP, Miranshah/ Quetta

Pakistani tribesmen held a rare meeting yesterday to try to broker a peace deal between the government and Taliban and al-Qaeda militants operating near the Afghan border, officials said.

The 45-member "grand jirga" or council including tribal elders, local legislators and Islamic scholars gathered in Miranshah, the capital of restive North Waziristan region.

Hundreds of people have died in recent clashes between security forces and fundamentalist Islamic rebels in the semi-autonomous tribal zone, but the insurgents launched a unilateral ceasefire there last month.

The government and the tribesmen say they are trying to find a

political solution in accordance with tribal customs and traditions, instead of dealing with the problem through military means.

"We are passing through a very difficult and delicate phase of our history," Lieutenant General Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai, the governor of North West Frontier Province, which borders the tribal region, told jirga members on Thursday.

"The current situation demands that we must take every step with caution and a deep sense of commitment and responsibility".

On the eve of the council meeting, the authorities as a "goodwill gesture" released 32 tribesmen and also removed six check posts from bazaars in Miranshah and the nearby town of MirAli, local official Fakhre Alam said.

Let truce monitors stay

Sweden urges Lankan rebels

REUTERS, Colombo

A Swedish envoy visited Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels in their northern base yesterday to urge them to reconsider their decision to oust EU truce monitors, amid fears it could destabilise the island as war fears grow.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insist that Nordic monitors from European Union nations Sweden, Denmark and Finland quit the island by Sept. 1 in light of a new EU ban against them, which would remove two thirds of the mission.

Swedish Ambassador-at-Large Anders Oljelund's visit comes against a backdrop of near daily attacks and clashes between the military and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which many fear could

spiral out of control and into renewed civil war.

"It is a question of seeing if they (Tigers) can reconsider what they are saying -- that they have to leave," said Lotta Jacobsen, acting head of mission at Sweden's embassy in Colombo.

"The visit is to say: Please let them stay."

The rebels insist 37 monitors from the three countries must leave, which would leave just 20 members of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) from Norway and Iceland -- not enough to properly monitor a 2002 truce stretched to breaking point.

That would also mean the ejection of the head of the monitors, retired Swedish Major General Ulf Hennricsson.

Rebel political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan told Reuters this

month the Tigers would only reconsider their position once the EU removes them from their list of terrorist organisations.

But no-one is clear on what will happen if the unarmed monitors ignore the unilateral Tiger ultimatum and stay on.

"What does the demand mean? Have they threatened the safety of EU nationals or not?" asked SLMM Thorfinnur Omarsson. "We have to get more clarification on what this deadline means."

"If they can't guarantee (our) safety, they are not committed to the ceasefire agreement," he added. "In the end, it's up to the three countries involved to make a decision."

He said opinions ranged from withdrawing the mission to ignoring the LTTE demand and continuing work as normal.