



Thailand's Government House picture shows Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (R) talking with Myanmar's Senior General Than Shwe in Myanmar's new administrative capital in a jungle compound outside the central town of Pynmana Wednesday. Thaksin said that he asked Myanmar's junta leader to free detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi during his surprise trip to the military-ruled country.

Pakistan, US sign deal to bolster frontier security

AFP, Islamabad

The United States will supply key ally Pakistan with an extra 2.7 million dollars worth of equipment for forces on the Afghan frontier under an agreement signed yesterday, a statement said.

US officials will also help train border guards, said the statement issued by the American embassy, following calls on Pakistan to crack down on cross-border infiltration of Taliban militants into Afghanistan.

Pakistani Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao and US envoy Ryan Crocker signed a memorandum of understanding for security and communications gear and to help build more frontier posts.

"We are pleased to be able to assist the Frontier Constabulary with its law enforcement efforts,"

Crocker was quoted as saying, referring to Pakistan's name for its border force.

Pakistan says it has around 80,000 troops along its porous 2,500-kilometre (1,550-mile) border with Afghanistan, ranging from the mountainous northwestern tribal areas to the deserts of southwestern Baluchistan province.

It has killed or captured hundreds of al-Qaeda and Taliban militants who crossed the frontier and took sanctuary in Pakistan since a US-led coalition ousted the Taliban in late 2001.

But Islamabad has faced months of pressure from Nato forces in Afghanistan, who want it to tackle insurgents whom they say are still operating from Pakistani soil.

Aid workers can't help as Lankan fighting rages

REUTERS, Trincomalee

Artillery pounded Tamil Tiger positions in northeast Sri Lanka, while rebels fought firefights with troops yesterday as the island slipped back towards civil war.

More than 800 people have died this year and ambushes, air strikes and naval clashes had become commonplace, but it was a dispute over a rebel-held water supply that led to the first major ground fighting since a 2002 ceasefire.

"Right now, it's very localised," said a diplomatic source. "But I think it will spread because the Tigers need to make the government wonder where to put their troops next."

The military said small units of troops were fanning out through the eastern town of Muttur to drive out rebels who pushed into the town on Wednesday and are holed up in homes and buildings.

"There are firefights and mortar and artillery fire still going on," said a military spokesman. "Some Tigers are still in the town and are

firing at our troops with small arms. They are surrounded and trying to move east back to their own territory."

As jets roared overhead, people stayed on the streets of Trincomalee town around 6 miles (10km) across the harbour of the same name, but most shops stayed shut in sympathy with residents of mainly Muslim Muttur. "This is a Muslim neighbourhood, but our shop is shut too," said Hindu general store owner R. Sigamany. "We are closed down in solidarity because people from all communities are dying."

Isolated violence also flashed in Mannar over the northwest coast, where the military said Tigers ambushed a patrol with a Claymore fragmentation mine and 81 mm mortar bombs. Two soldiers were injured.

Both sides say they want peace but diplomats fear the truce may become irrelevant and a two-decade civil war that has killed more than 65,000 people will resume.

Nepal govt, Maoists fail to agree on arms handover

AFP, Kathmandu

A senior United Nations official Thursday urged Nepal's new government and rebel Maoists to work to build trust after the two sides failed to reach agreement on disarmament.

"What I detected is there is a lack of trust in some cases and there is a lack of knowledge about some of the techniques of confidence-building. In both cases the UN can help," Staffan de Mistura, head of a UN mission, told reporters before ending his seven-day visit.

"I would have liked to have those confidence-building measures taking place immediately but even if they are announced in the next two or three days... it's fine," he said.

He added: "I am not disappointed. Of course you always expect the momentum to go faster than what

sometimes happens but I am quite optimistic."

Earlier Thursday a minister said the government and the rebels hoped to present a "common view" to the United Nations team.

"We tried our best to reach a deal with the rebels to settle the arms issue but unfortunately it did not materialize today," said Labour Minister Ramesh Lekhak, a member of the government negotiating team, later in the day.

"The meeting will continue Friday and we are very much hopeful that a common understanding will be reached soon," Lekhak said.

Arms management has been a key issue since the government agreed to a Maoist demand for elections to a constituent assembly that will rewrite the constitution and decide the monarchy's future.

The UN team, including experts

on policing, human rights and staging elections, arrived last week to see how it could help the peace process.

"The visit of the UN assessment mission was concluded with a sense of cautious optimism about the possibilities for future and continuous engagement of the UN in various important aspects related to the peace process in Nepal," Mistura said.

He said the UN could provide weapons management, electoral assistance, help in monitoring a code of conduct and the expansion of human rights activities.

The government was set up after popular protests spearheaded by political parties and the rebels forced King Gyanendra to give up absolute power in April.

Suicide bombing kills 21 in southern Afghanistan

One Canadian 10 Taliban killed in fighting

AFP, Kandahar

A suicide car bomb exploded yesterday in a bazaar in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province, killing at least 21 civilians and injuring 13 while 11 others were killed in fighting, the interior ministry said.

The bomb detonated in the volatile Panjwayi district of the insurgency-hit province, interior ministry spokesman Yousuf Stanizai told AFP.

"There was a suicide attack in Panjwayi bazaar. Twenty-one civilians, including children, were killed and 13 others were injured," he said.

A Canadian soldier was killed in southern Afghanistan yesterday, the fourth Nato fatality since the

alliance took command of the area this week, while police said 10 Taliban died in a raid.

The soldier was killed before dawn when an improvised bomb of the sort often used by the fundamentalist Taliban struck his vehicle on a main highway in southern Kandahar province, a statement said.

Another Canadian soldier from the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) soldier was wounded in the blast. He was expected to return to duty shortly, spokesman Major Scott Lundy told AFP.

The nearly 8,000 troops in six southern provinces that Isaf took command of on Monday include British, Canadian, Dutch and US soldiers.

Nineteen Canadian soldiers deployed to Afghanistan have been

killed since 2001 when US-led forces toppled the hardline Taliban regime.

Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, sees regular suicide and roadside bombings against foreign troops, mainly the 2,300 Canadians based in the volatile province since the beginning of the year.

The day after Isaf took over from the US-led coalition that toppled the Taliban regime, three British soldiers were killed in the north of neighbouring Helmand province when rebels attacked their convoy.

On Wednesday Nato warplanes provided air support when security forces in southern Helmand raided Taliban hideouts in Garmser district, the main town of which was captured by the rebels for about 48 hours last month.