

# Fighting worsens in Lanka: 13 killed

## Tigers blame troops for killing 50 civilians

AP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan military attacked Tamil Tiger rebels from land and air yesterday, and the rebels retaliated in heavy fighting that killed at least 13 combatants, officials said. A Nordic cease-fire monitor warned that the situation was worsening.

A senior rebel official, Seevarathnam Puleedevan, said at least 50 civilians had been killed and 200 injured in the government military operation, but a military spokesman said he was unaware of any civilian casualties.

Puleedevan appealed to the International Committee of the Red Cross to help evacuate civilian casualties, saying there weren't enough facilities locally available

there to treat them. But ICRC official Davide Vignati said the organization had yet to receive an official request from either side.

At least six government soldiers were killed and 49 wounded and admitted to hospital, a doctor said. A Tiger spokesman, Rasiah Ilanthirayan, said seven rebels had died and 15 others were wounded.

"It is a warlike situation, our forces are retaliating with artillery fire and direct gun fire," Ilanthirayan said.

"The situation is worsening," said Robert Nilsson, a member of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. "Hopefully there will be a change of heart, this has already gone too far."

The fighting centered around a key reservoir and canal in

Trincomalee district, which in recent weeks has seen some of the worst fighting since the country's 2002 cease-fire, with estimates of the number of combatants and civilians killed ranging from about 100 to 300.

Dr. BGM Costa, a hospital doctor in Kantale, a town in the area, said the bodies of five soldiers had been brought in and 35 others were wounded. Two with critical injuries were flown to Colombo.

Military spokesman Maj. Upali Rajapakse said he was not aware of any civilian casualties, but said the rebels were "known for using civilians as human shields and they place their gun positions around civilian villages."

"The Sri Lankan army does not target civilians," he said.

The rebels closed sluice gates at the reservoir on July 20, cutting water to over 60,000 people living in government-controlled villages, after accusing the government of reneging on a pledge to boost water in rebel-held areas.

The rebels announced on Tuesday that they were reopening the gates, saying that heavy attacks on rebel areas by army troops were hurting civilians, and the military said Wednesday that it had reclaimed control of the waterway.

But the government resumed shelling the area around the reservoir the same day, saying it needed to clear the area of rebels so they would not be able to block the water supply again.



Volunteers carry wounded soldiers airlifted to a hospital in Sri Lanka's eastern town of Polonnaruwa yesterday. Sri Lankan war planes bombed Tamil Tiger positions as the two sides shelled each other around a disputed waterway.

## Nepal govt, rebels refuse draft interim constitution

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's government and Maoist rebels Wednesday refused to accept a draft interim constitution as some key issues remained unsettled, officials said.

The two sides earlier in the day, however, settled a dispute over monitoring each other's fighters and weapons, a move which revives their peace process and power-sharing plans intended to end a bloody decade-long insurgency.

"The government-Maoists talks team refused to accept the draft today. They said they would announce the new date to receive the draft," Laxman Prasad Aryal, head of the drafting panel, told AFP.

Earlier Wednesday, Aryal had said the panel would submit the draft to the talks team despite some of the key political issues remaining unsettled.

"We don't want to take the incomplete draft. The seven parties will soon reach a common consensus and give their views to the panel and receive a final and complete draft from the panel," Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula told reporters.



Water gushes over the railway tracks forcing cancellation of the train service between Ahmedabad and Mumbai as villagers crouch on roof-tops in the village of Sion, in the western state of Gujarat Wednesday.

# Floods hit 13m Indians

## Swamped diamond city sees hope

AFP, Ahmedabad

Thirteen million people across west and south India were still hit by floods yesterday, officials said, but water levels in one city, which had faced total inundation were beginning to recede.

Border guards joined the army in a huge rescue effort in Surat city. Officials said the number killed since the floods hit western Gujarat and Maharashtra and southern Andhra Pradesh states nine days ago was now 240 with 179 missing.

The home ministry said it rushed units of the Border Security Force and some 1,000 personnel of the National Disaster Rescue Force to Surat in Gujarat Thursday in a bid to help its 3.5 million residents marooned in the inundated city.

The air force rushed a flotilla of helicopters to support border guards,

soldiers and the coastguard in plucking people from rooftops and dropping supplies in Surat.

Conditions were beginning to ease Thursday afternoon and authorities were able to reduce the amount of water they have been releasing from the nearby Ukai dam into a river flowing through the city, an official said.

"The situation is improving as the waters have started receding due to less release of water from Ukai and the completion of high tide in the sea," said Surat administrator Vatsala Vasudevan, who estimated that 50 percent of the city remained under water.

Air force spokesman Wing Commander Tarun Singha said helicopters were working round-the-clock in Surat, which accounts for 70 percent of India's polished diamond exports and boasts some of the

country's largest textile houses.

"We are losing count of sorties or tonnage of relief sent as we are throwing in every aircraft that we are getting," Singha said from the city of Bhavnagar, across the Gulf of Khambhat from coastal Surat, from where the rescue is being coordinated.

"In fact, the entire armed forces is now in action out there," Singha told AFP as Gujarat state sought 20 billion rupees (444 million dollars) in emergency federal government handouts.

Gujarat Revenue Minister Kaushik Patel said 10 million people were "seriously affected" by floods in the rain-soaked state and more than 5,200 Surat residents have been saved from imminent death, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

## Pakistan detains Lashkar-e-Taiba outfit's ex-chief

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani authorities have placed under house arrest the former head of an Islamic militant group which Indian police suspect had a role in the Mumbai bombings, officials said yesterday.

Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, the founder of the Lashkar-e-Taiba outfit, which is fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, was held in the eastern city of Lahore for a one-month period, a Punjab province home department official said.

"Hafiz Saeed has been detained to maintain law and order," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Saeed abandoned Lashkar-e-Taiba in 2001 -- a day before it was banned by Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf -- and set up the Islamic charity Jamaat-ud-Dawa, regarded as its political wing.

## Verdict in 1993 Mumbai blasts delayed until Sept 12

REUTERS, Mumbai

An Indian court put off until next month a final verdict on the 1993 serial bomb blasts in the country's financial hub that killed 257 people.

The series of 13 blasts in Mumbai, including at the Bombay Stock Exchange building, a cinema hall and a busy market, was the deadliest bomb attack in India.

"The trial court has commenced delivery of judgement against all the 123 accused but the final verdict will come on September 12," public prosecutor Ujjawal Nikam told reporters.

"On that day, the court will announce who are guilty and who are innocent," he added.

Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt is among the accused and was arrested when two suspects said he had bought an assault rifle from them. He was released on bail after over a year in prison.

# Opposition to move no-trust vote against Pakistani PM

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistani opposition parties plan to move a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz on August 23, opposition lawmakers said yesterday.

Aziz's economic reforms have strengthened the economy, but ordinary Pakistanis complain of rising prices and unemployment.

The opposition's main complaint against Aziz, a former finance minister and ex-Citibank executive, is that he was chosen by President Pervez Musharraf, who came to power in a military coup in late 1999 and controversially retains his role as army chief.

The move will be backed by an Islamist alliance, which forms the largest opposition bloc, as well as the mainstream parties of former

Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, who are both living in exile.

"We have decided to move the no-trust motion in the National Assembly on August 23," Liaquat Baluch, a leader of the Islamist Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal alliance, told Reuters.

The opposition lacks the necessary seats in the assembly to win a vote, but the move is seen as part of a campaign to keep the government on the defensive ahead of elections due late next year.

"This government has lost confidence of the people on all fronts," Farhatullah Babar, a spokesman for Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party said.

"This whole system is planted by General Musharraf to sustain military power and yes, this no-trust is

all against General Musharraf."

Musharraf has already said that under the constitution he can be re-elected for a second term of office by the current assembly, before it is dissolved in late 2007.

Benazir and Sharif in May put aside their differences and vowed to work together by signing a "charter of democracy" in London, and said they would return to Pakistan together before the general election.

Musharraf's current term expires in mid-November next year, as does parliament's.

After the coup, Musharraf was regarded as a pariah in the international community until Washington embraced him as an ally in a war on terrorism following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

# Fighting kills 20 in Afghanistan

AP, Kabul

Fighting in Afghanistan's south left 12 suspected Taliban and eight police dead, while a roadside bomb yesterday killed an Afghan civilian in an eastern province, officials said.

The roadside bomb went off in Jalalabad Thursday morning while Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry the top US general in Afghanistan visited a US base in the city.

The Interior Ministry said one Afghan civilian died. Dr. Ajmel Pardes, health chief for Nangahar province, said seven civilians were wounded, three critically.

US military spokesman Col. Tom Collins said the general had not travelled the road where the bomb exploded and that it was unlikely he was the target. Collins said the general was at a US provincial reconstruction team base in Jalalabad at the time, and only visited the site of the blast two hours later.

"We were at a PRT in Jalalabad receiving a briefing when the blast

occurred," Collins said. "We were nowhere near it."

Afghanistan has seen an upsurge of violence this year, particularly in the south where rebel supporters of the Taliban regime have stepped up attacks. Afghan and Nato-led troops are trying to drive insurgents out of their safe havens, triggering the bloodiest fighting in nearly five years.

In Kandahar province, Taliban rebels and police fought for about 90 minutes on Tuesday in Panjwayi district, until the rebels fled, taking their dead and wounded, said provincial government spokesman Dawood Ahmadi.

Twelve militants and eight policemen were killed; nine militants and seven police were wounded, he said.

In southeastern Paktika province, a roadside bomb on Wednesday killed two Afghan soldiers and wounded three in Waza Khwa district as they returned after a mission to help police surrounded

by insurgents, said Defence Ministry spokesman Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi.

Meanwhile, in the eastern province of Nuristan, one of the country's wildest regions, US soldiers and warplanes drove off an insurgent attack early Wednesday on a new American base, killing 19 militants, US Maj. Tom Sutton said.

The raid on the US base at Kamdesh was staged by extremists likely belonging to the Hezb-e-Islami militant group of renegade Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the military said. The militants attacked from three directions out of forests using rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire.

Several hundred soldiers at the base, which lies in a small town but backs onto a sheer mountain face, returned fire with mortars and small arms before jets dropped four 500-pound bombs, ending the clash, which lasted more than two hours.

## 'US spy' shot dead in Pak tribal area

AFP, Wana

Pro-Taliban militants shot dead a Pakistani tribesman after accusing him of spying for US troops in neighbouring Afghanistan, local officials and family members said yesterday.

In the latest of a series of similar incidents, Nek Mohammad, 40, was gunned down late Wednesday outside his home near Angoor Ada, a remote border town in the semi-autonomous tribal region of South Waziristan, they said.

He had been receiving threats from militants for the past few months, his cousin Dilawar Khan told AFP. He said one letter had warned: "Stop spying for US forces in Afghanistan or you will be killed."

Insurgents on Monday beheaded a pro-government tribal elder in the adjoining tribal region of North Waziristan on similar charges.



Indian film star Sanjay Dutt (L) arrives at the Tada court for the commencement of the 1993 bomb attack case verdict in Mumbai yesterday. The final verdict will be announced on September 12.