

## 'No evidence slain girls are LTTE cadres'

### Age of enemy no concern, says Lanka

AFP, REUTERS, Colombo

The UN children's agency said yesterday there is no evidence to support military claims that dozens of children killed in a Sri Lankan air force bombing raid were Tamil Tiger cadres.

A team from the United Nations children's fund Unicef had visited the site in the northern rebel-controlled district of Mullaitivu and was horrified at the extent of the carnage, said Sri Lankan representative Joanna van Gerten.

"These were children from surrounding schools in the area who were brought there for a two-day training workshop on first aid, by whom we don't know yet," she told AFP.

"We have not been able to come down to who organised this training."

While Unicef has documentary evidence to prove that the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) recruit children, there is no evidence that those killed and injured on Monday were among them.

"As of this time, we don't have any evidence that they are LTTE cadres," she said.

Sri Lanka said yesterday the age of its enemy was of no concern after the air force killed at least 19 people, many of them teenagers, during a bombing raid in Tamil Tiger territory a day earlier.

Tiger rebels said on Monday the air force killed 61 schoolgirls who were attending a first-aid course. The government says it bombed a Tiger training and transit camp.

The fact is that gender or the age limit is of no concern when it comes to training and when it comes to soldiers, because they are carrying arms in order to kill the enemy (government forces)," Defence spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella told a

news conference.

"So even if it is a 17-year-old child in terms of age, they are soldiers who are prepared to kill whoever comes in front of them. Therefore, the age or the gender is not what is important."

Tamil Tiger guerrillas said 61 schoolgirls were killed and 150 wounded when air force jets Monday hit a "Senchholai", an orphanage run by the LTTE in Mullaitivu.

The government denied it bombed an orphanage, saying it had targeted a LTTE training centre and that those killed could have been child soldiers recruited by the rebels.

Van Gerten said the Unicef team that visited a hospital found more than 100 children, mostly girls aged between 16 to 19, being treated for various injuries. She did not have exact figures as to how many were killed or injured.

## UK mulls profiling of Muslim air passengers

AFP, London

Britain is considering a system of air passenger profiling in the wake of arrests in connection with an alleged aircraft bomb plot, it was reported yesterday.

The plan -- similar to a system operated by Israeli airline El Al -- was immediately condemned by one of Britain's most senior Muslim police officers, who said that it could lead to a new offence of "travelling whilst Asian".

The head of the main Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) umbrella group also said it could hamper the anti-terrorism effort, leading to a "backlash", especially from increasingly marginalised young British Muslims.

According to The Times, the Department for Transport (DfT) was considering a system to single out people behaving suspiciously, who have an unusual travel pattern, or a certain ethnic or religious background.



Jammu college students dance during official celebrations for India's 59th Independence Day at Bakshi Stadium in Srinagar yesterday. A total strike sponsored by Muslim separatists and smothering security presence kept residents indoors in Kashmir's mainly-dominated towns on India's Independence Day.



Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visits the Yasukuni war shrine on the 61st anniversary of Japan's World War II while South Korean protesters burn his picture during an anti-Japan rally near the Japanese embassy in Seoul yesterday.

## Koizumi defies China, South Korea with war shrine visit

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid his respects at Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine for war dead yesterday, the anniversary of his country's World War Two surrender, defying warnings from China and South Korea not to go.

The parting shot by the outgoing Japanese leader prompted angry protests from Beijing and Seoul.

Koizumi is set to step down in September, and China in particular appears to be counting on his heir apparent, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, to help repair ties.

On Tuesday, Abe, 51 -- a security hawk who has visited Yasukuni himself in the past -- called for dialogue, but declined to say whether he would

go there if he became premier.

The Shinto shrine honours Japanese World War Two leaders convicted as war criminals along with 2.5 million war dead and is considered a symbol of Japan's past militarism in the two Asian countries, which bore the brunt of Japanese aggression.

Koizumi, wearing a morning suit and looking solemn as he followed behind a Shinto priest clad in traditional robes, bowed before entering the inner shrine as a steady rain fell.

The pilgrimage was the first by a Japanese prime minister on the August 15 anniversary since Yasuhiro Nakasone went there on the emotive date in 1985, setting off howls of protest in China.

## Manmohan asks Pakistan to fulfil anti-terror pledge

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday said unless Pakistan honours its commitment to stop terrorism originating from territory held by it, the public opinion in India favouring the peace process would weaken.

"It is clear that unless Pakistan takes concrete steps to honour the pledge it has made to crack down on anti-India groups operating from areas under its control, public support (in India) for the peace process would diminish," Singh said in his Independence Day address to the nation.

He said South Asia needs "an atmosphere of peace" to lift its hundreds of millions of people out of pov-

erty. "Our neighbours must realise that terrorism can affect anyone anywhere," Singh said in his speech delivered from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort here.

In January 2004, India and Pakistan agreed to start a peace process and Islamabad agreed to crack down on militants who crossed into Jammu and Kashmir.

"India is facing two major threats to its internal security - terrorism and Naxalism," the Indian Prime Minister said.

Singh said just over a month ago, Mumbai witnessed the most inhuman terrorist attack in the recent past, killing and injuring hundreds of innocent citizens.

"Terrorists want to undermine our growing economic strength,

destroy our unity and provoke communal incidents. We cannot allow this to happen. Our strength lies in our unity. We will not allow the secular fabric of our country to be broken," he said.

"Let those, who want to hurt us by inflicting a thousand cuts, remember -- no one can break our will or unity. No one can make India kneel," he added.

Assuring the nation that the government would do its utmost to preserve its unity and integrity, he said "we will modernise, strengthen and properly equip our security forces and our intelligence agencies. We will leave no stone unturned in ensuring that terrorist elements in India are neutralised and smashed."

## LEBANON TRUCE

# Hezbollah gets a boost as Israel govt badly bruised

AP, Jerusalem

The war in Lebanon has badly bruised the Israeli government and boosted Hezbollah's standing in the Arab world.

Israel says it has made some gains the Lebanese army, backed by international troops, is to take control of south Lebanon.

But as the guns fall silent, an ominous question lingers over the Jewish state: Is another war with Hezbollah or even its sponsor Iran just around the corner?

A ceasefire that took effect Monday seeks to end the 34-day conflict in which the mightiest army in the Middle East was fought to a virtual draw by a small band of Shiite guerrillas.

Developments on the ground will determine the war's ultimate winners and losers whether Hezbollah will be pushed back from Israel's border and eventually disarmed, whether Israel will be able to prevent Iran and Syria from funneling weapons to Lebanese guerrillas, whether Islamic radicals everywhere will be propped up by Hezbollah's successes.

For now, neither side can truly declare victory. Hezbollah's ability to withstand more than a month of Israel's punishing assaults while firing an uninterrupted stream of more than 4,000 rockets has given its fighters heroic status on Arab and Muslim streets.

"The biggest thing here is that Hezbollah and their small force has been able to restore the dignity of the Arabs. That is the bottom line," said Timur Goksel, an American University of Beirut professor who spent more than two decades as a senior UN adviser in south Lebanon.

But having joined the Lebanese government, the guerrillas are likely to pay a steep political price for provoking Israel's wrath. On July 12, they captured two Israeli soldiers and killed three others in a daring cross-border raid, sparking a war that killed more than 790 Lebanese and left much of that country in shambles.

And even if Israel achieves its goal of pushing Hezbollah away from its border, it, too, has suffered great losses, with 155 dead and hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee their homes or seek refuge in bomb shelters.

Israel failed to achieve its original goal of destroying Hezbollah or the group's fearsome array of Iranian and Syrian-provided rockets.

Israeli critics are warning that Israel's deterrence may have suffered a life-threatening blow, giving arch-enemy Iran an opening to pursue its stated goal of destroying Israel.

"A couple thousand Iranian-backed Hezbollah fighters kept Israel at bay for over a month," said Chuck Freilich, Israel's former deputy National Security Adviser who is now a senior fellow at the

Kennedy School of Government. "This now shows that irregular forces with Iranian support can be effective against a large and sophisticated conventional army."

If Israel can't deal effectively with Hezbollah now, some Israelis ask, what's going to happen down the road when Iran sends even more lethal weapons? For many, the future looks scary.

Hezbollah's rocket barrage, threatening the entire northern third of Israel, shattered taboos and seemed to signal that the Jewish state's survival is no longer a given.

In a speech Monday evening, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the ceasefire deal had eliminated Hezbollah's "state within a state" in Lebanon, and restored the Lebanese government's sovereignty in the south.

That's no small achievement for Israel, which has been trying in vain for six years ever since it withdrew from south Lebanon following an 18-year occupation to get Lebanon to implement a UN resolution calling for the central government to take control of the whole country.

For now, the main goal of Israel, Lebanon and the international community is to make the Lebanon cease-fire stick a huge challenge because Hezbollah insists Israeli soldiers are legitimate targets until they leave, but Israel says it won't leave until the Lebanese army deploys.

## France ties Lebanon deployment to Hezbollah disarmament

AFP, Paris

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy was to travel to Lebanon Tuesday to discuss conditions for the deployment of an expanded UN force in that country - notably the disarmament of Hezbollah.

France, expected to be the lead nation for a UN force to be deployed to Lebanon, has said it will not commit to sending any soldiers without guarantees the Shia militia will lay down its arms.

"Time is of the essence," Douste-Blazy told French television ahead of taking a flight to Cyprus, from where he was going to go on to Beirut for a meeting Wednesday with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

"The Lebanese army has to be deployed in the south, with support from Unifil (the UN Interim Force in Lebanon)," he said.

"Hezbollah will disengage and Hezbollah will disarm according to a plan that will be set out by the Lebanese government," he said.

France, which is expected to supply up to 4,000 soldiers to Unifil and command the UN force, is concerned that its men and other foreign soldiers could be targeted for Hezbollah attacks if the disarmament process is not guaranteed before a deployment.

Foremost is fear of a repeat of 1983 suicide attacks in Beirut attributed to a Hezbollah faction

that killed 58 French soldiers and 241 US Marines.

Douste-Blazy has said that UN resolution 1701, which gives the mandate for an expanded Unifil of 15,000 international troops, contained "obligations" that had to be observed.

In particular, the resolution calls for Israel and Lebanon to support a solution based on previous UN resolutions requiring "the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon" apart from state security forces.

But Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah late Monday vowed that his fighters would not be forced to disarm by "intimidation or pressure."

And Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr said Monday that his country's army "won't be deployed to south Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah, something which Israel wasn't able to do itself."

While Unifil's mandate with the new resolution does not require the foreign troops to disarm Hezbollah themselves, the force is authorised "to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind" and to support the Lebanese army in asserting control over all of Lebanon.

Douste-Blazy's visit to Lebanon was to be his fourth since the conflict started July 12 -- and the first since it ended with a tenuous ceasefire that came into effect on Monday.



Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse (L) speaks to Bavani, wife of former Sri Lanka Peace Secretariat deputy Kethesh Loganathan in Colombo yesterday. President Rajapakse accused Tamil Tiger rebels of assassinating Loganathan.

## Japan tanker spills crude oil in east Indian Ocean

REUTERS, Tokyo

A tanker on its way from the Middle East to Japan spilled about 4,500 tonnes of crude oil in the eastern Indian Ocean, tanker owner Mitsui O.S.K. Lines Ltd. said yesterday.

The leak from the tanker Bright Artemis on Monday afternoon occurred some 470km west of India's Great Nicobar Island.

The Singapore-flagged tanker, a 260,000-tonne single-hull crude carrier, was transporting about 250,000 tonnes of crude oil from Mina al Fahal port in Oman and Ras Tanura in Saudi Arabia, Mitsui O.S.K. said in a statement.

## 'Depressed get more out of marriage'

AFP, Washington

One way to get more out of marriage may just be to start out depressed, said a US study, which shows that spouses may not share equally the benefits of marriage.

"If you start out happy, you don't have so far to go," said Ohio State University Professor Kristi Williams.

"Marriage may give depressed people a greater sense that they matter to someone, while people who aren't depressed prior to marriage may have always thought that way," she said.

The study was to be presented Sunday in Montreal at the American Sociological Association annual meeting.

The study used data collected by the US National Survey of Families and Households, which interviewed 3,066 persons in 1987-1988 and again in 1993-1994 -- before and after five years of marriage.

## Credibility of US report on human trafficking questioned

AFP, Washington

The credibility of an annual US report that blacklisted countries linked to human trafficking has been questioned in a Congressional probe that called the report inconsistent and incomplete.

The report by the State Department analyses the issue in about 150 countries and ranks them by their efforts to combat trafficking for forced labour, prostitution, military service and other purposes.

But the explanations for ranking decisions in the annual "Trafficking in Persons Report" are incomplete and "not used consistently to develop anti-trafficking programmes," said the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, in a damning study released Monday.

While the annual report raised the risk of sanctions against governments that did not comply with minimum standards to eliminate trafficking, it "does not comprehensively describe compliance with the standards," the study said.

This "lessen(s) the reports credibility and usefulness as a diplomatic tool," it said.

"Further, incomplete country narratives reduce the reports utility as a guide to help focus US government resources on anti-trafficking programming priorities," it added.

In the latest report released in June, the State Department listed Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Sudan, Cuba, Myanmar, Iran, Syria, Zimbabwe, Uzbekistan, Laos and Belize in the so-called Tier 3 worst offenders of human trafficking.