

# Lanka moves to lift Jaffna siege amid fighting

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops backed by artillery and fighter jets are resisting a Tamil Tiger rebel advance on the Jaffna peninsula amid moves to lift a nine-day siege of the embattled region, military officials said yesterday.

Overnight attacks by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on troops at Muhamali on the southern edge of the Jaffna district led to casualties on both sides, a military official said.

He said at least 10 soldiers had been killed and about 125 wounded in sporadic clashes along front lines in the past two days. The rebel offensive began nine days ago and is believed aimed at capturing Jaffna.

Tigers ran the peninsula as a de facto separate state for five years till they were driven out in 1995. They tried to recapture it in 2000

but were stopped after advancing one third of the way to Jaffna town, the cultural centre of the Tamils.

"The objective of the latest LTTE offensive is to recapture Jaffna," defence ministry spokesman Upali Rajapakse said. "We have successfully resisted their advance."

The military on Friday bombed what it called a Sea Tiger base used to manufacture attack craft. The LTTE in a statement Sunday said the air force had hit a civilian boatyard and wounded two people. The defence ministry said a large number of guerrillas were killed on Saturday but did not give figures for the military.

"The security forces today found over 80 dead bodies lying ahead of the forward defence lines," it said in a statement. "The troops were in the process of collecting the dead bodies."

There was no immediate reac-

tion from the rebels to the purported death toll, and no independent verification was available. Both sides are known to exaggerate casualty figures.

The fighting has cut the only land access to the peninsula and also prevented aircraft flying to Palaly airbase at the northern edge of the peninsula after the runway was hit by Tiger shells last week.

Supplies by ship were also hampered as the Tigers hit the northeast port of Trincomalee where Jaffna-bound cargoes originate.

Rajapakse said the authorities were arranging ships to travel from Colombo and take supplies to the peninsula for the 350,000 civilians and an estimated force of 40,000 troops.

The latest violence has left a February 2002 ceasefire in tatters.

The World Food Programme warned of worsening conditions on

the peninsula, with shortages across the board and only eight days of fuel left to power generators keeping UN offices running.

The United Nations said Friday more than 41,000 people on the peninsula were believed to have fled their homes and warned that supplies in the area had reached "alarmingly low levels."

A curfew in Jaffna was eased over the weekend and residents attempted to stock up on provisions but long queues, high prices and hoarding were reported.

An unspecified number of foreign nationals were also trapped in Jaffna as private flights were halted with the outbreak of fighting.

Many foreigners of Sri Lankan origin visit relatives in Jaffna and aid agencies have expatriate staff in the region, including five with UN organisations, officials said.

## Rebels blow up gas pipeline in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta

Tribal insurgents blew up a gas pipeline in southwestern Pakistan's restive province of Baluchistan early yesterday, disrupting supplies in the area, officials said.

The pre-dawn blast damaged the main pipeline in the Loti gas field, 450km southeast of the provincial capital Quetta, a gas company official said.

The official, who requested anonymity, said the attack affected supplies to local consumers. He blamed rebels, who are fighting for greater autonomy and a share of profits from the region's natural resources.

Sunday's attack was the fourth on gas pipelines in the province this month.

Baluchistan has seen nearly two years of attacks on pipelines, railway tracks and government installations.

Officials say hundreds of people have died since the unrest erupted in late 2004.

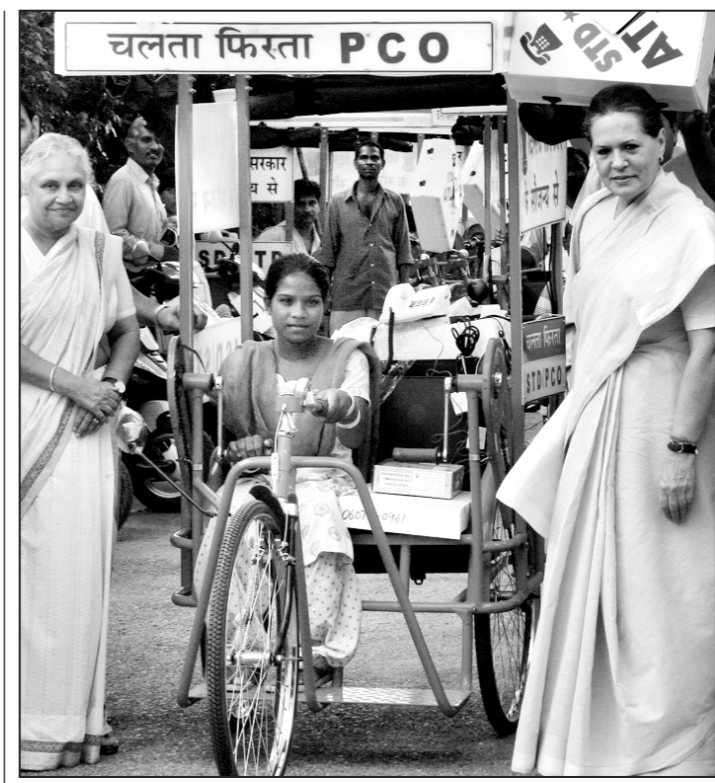


PHOTO: AFP

Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government and Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi (R) distributes a mobile telephone tricycle to a handicapped woman marking the 62nd birthday of her assassinated husband and former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi as Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit (L) looks on in New Delhi yesterday.

## Pakistan to offer incentives to foreign firms in nuke field

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan has decided to set up 'designated nuclear power parks' as an additional incentive to attract foreign investors to build and run atomic power plants in the country.

Pakistan's growing energy requirements would be partly met by nuclear power for which it was imperative to provide enhanced facilities and tax concessions to the foreign investors interested in setting up private nuclear power plants, Dawn daily on Sunday quoted an official as saying.

The official pointed out that the setting up of nuclear power plants by foreign investors under the safeguards of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would address "proliferation concerns" of the US and western countries.

Pakistan's Private Power and Infrastructure Board (PPIB) was being asked to work out fiscal and non-fiscal incentives to attract foreign investment, the official said.

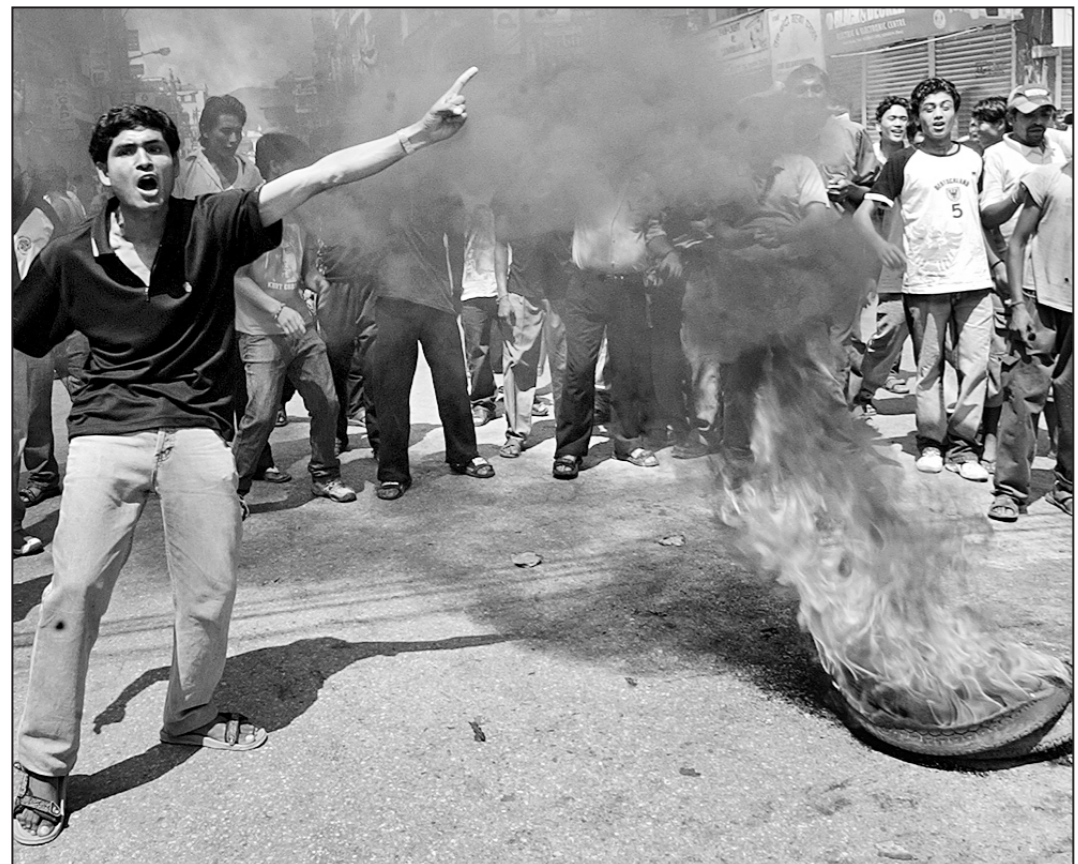


PHOTO: AFP

A protester shouts anti-government slogans next to a burning tyre on the second day of protests against the price hike in petrol and cooking gas in Kathmandu yesterday. The government raised the prices of petrol by 25 percent and cooking gas by 11 percent, which was strongly criticised by politicians and the general public.

## Nepal revokes fuel price hike after angry protests

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's government Sunday cancelled price rises for gasoline and other fuel after two days of widespread protests crippled the capital, a minister said.

"The cabinet meeting decided to roll back the price to the previous rate after days of protests by people and MPs' criticism," Hridayesh Tripathi, minister for commerce, industry and supplies, told AFP.

At Sunday's parliamentary sitting MPs demanded the immediate withdrawal of the price increases which they called an "anti-people" move.

"The government has formed a three-member committee which will submit its report within a month in order to hike the price of petroleum products," Tripathi said.

"The committee will recommend to the government how to adjust the petroleum prices as per the international market and suggest reforms needed in the management of the Nepal Oil Corp before announcing the price hike next time."

Demonstrations broke out throughout the city of 1.5 million Saturday and Sunday as hundreds burned tyres and shouted slogans

calling on the government to revoke the increases.

Two government-owned motorcycles were torched and six vehicles were vandalised on Sunday, police said. Businesses in the city shut on both days.

The government late Friday raised the price of petrol, diesel, kerosene and cooking gas by as much as 25 per cent to offset the impact of soaring global oil prices on the Nepal Oil Corp, which sells fuel at subsidised prices in the impoverished kingdom.

The minister earlier said that the corporation, a monopoly importer and distributor of petroleum products, owes 161.16 million dollars to financial institutions -- including 121.12 million dollars to its sole supplier Indian Oil Corp.

The government increased petrol prices by 25 percent a litre to 84.28 rupees (1.13 dollars). Kerosene was raised by 23 percent, diesel by 11 percent and cooking gas by 11 percent.

The new government came to power in April, after King Gyanendra gave up his absolute rule in the face of mass street protests.

## Protests in Kathmandu over fuel price hike

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Activists torched dozens of vehicles and attacked a senior politician in Kathmandu on Saturday in protest against an increase in prices of petroleum products, police and witnesses said.

Police used batons to break up protests as hundreds of people also burned tyres and stopped traffic in the city, a police officer said.

Dozens of protesters threw rocks and broke window panes of the home of Madhav Kumar Nepal, head of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the second biggest group in the multi-party government. But the leader was unhurt, his family said.

Activists in the city, home to 1.5 million people, demanded the multi-party government - formed in April after King Gyanendra was forced to relinquish power - roll back the increase which was announced late on Friday.

## Musharraf failing to curb extremism in Pakistan: Benazir

AFP, London

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf needs to do more to limit the influence of religious parties and militant groups to tackle extremism, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto said in London yesterday.

Pakistan's first female premier said the Pakistani authorities should be applauded for helping their British counterparts in the August 10 operation against an alleged plot to blow up US-bound aircraft.

But Benazir told BBC News 24 television she was concerned about the effectiveness of efforts to curb fanaticism because "when terrorists are apprehended the roads all seem to lead to Islamabad".

"The international community took a decision to back the military dictatorship of General Musharraf but that's not enough," she said.

"We need to create a climate within Pakistan where the moderate forces can triumph. At the moment I see that the religious

parties are gaining in strength and the militants, despite several crackdowns are intact.

"As long as the militants remain intact they will continue to make further plots."

Benazir, who twice governed Pakistan in 1988-1990 and 1993-1996, said part of the problem came in the contradiction between Musharraf's support for the spread of democracy in neighbouring Afghanistan and his own unelected status.

The president had proved himself unable to deal with the militants because of the combined effects of a lack of an effective political system and widespread poverty, she added.

Benazir, 53, left Pakistan in April 1999 amid a string of corruption allegations, which she denies and argues are politically motivated.

In May this year, she and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, whom Musharraf ousted in 1999, agreed a "charter of democracy" and pledged to return from exile to challenge the incumbent president in elections due next year.

## Indian lawyer launches crusade against rights abuses in Kashmir

AFP, New Delhi

It took Supreme Court lawyer Sonia Raj Sood just one visit to Indian-administered Kashmir to find her true calling in life -- to fight atrocities against Kashmiris attributed to India's security forces.

"You may read about it but you only really understand it when you get to Srinagar," Sood told AFP, referring to the summer capital of India's zone of Kashmir.

"You realise that atrocities are being committed against an entire race and ... they are being committed by our army," she said.

The "pain and suffering and trauma" she saw in Kashmir prompted her to launch her own one-woman campaign to persuade Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to rein in the troops.

Since that first trip to Kashmir in February this year, the 40-year-old Supreme Court advocate has crisscrossed India, Pakistan and Britain in a bid to persuade prominent personalities to write letters to Singh urging him to order a halt to human

rights violations there.

The dynamic yet unlikely activist -- she was once married to a Maharashtra prince and lived in a palace near Mumbai -- began her campaign in India, twisting the arms of colleagues and political leaders until they fired off letters to the Indian premier.

She then crossed the border into Pakistan where she sweet-talked a string of parliamentarians, including Chaudhry Shujat Hussain, president of the majority party in the National Assembly, to write to Singh.

"I would urge you to take a bold initiative by seeking the withdrawal of Indian troops from Jammu and Kashmir, from those areas where human rights violations have been documented," wrote Hussain.

She also got former Pakistan cricket captain Imran Khan, now leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf or Movement for Justice party, to urge a pullout of Indian troops from Kashmir, where they have been battling an Islamic insurgency since 1989.

## Canadian arrested in major drug bust in India

AFP, New Delhi

A Canadian was arrested with illegal drugs worth five million dollars in the Indian capital in what was billed as a major effort to stop narcotics being shipped to the West, police said yesterday.

About 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of ephedrine, hashish and other illegal drugs were seized overnight from Giridish Singh Toor while he was leading a convoy of vehicles in New Delhi, police deputy commissioner Ravindra Yadav said.

"The value of the seized drugs is more than five million dollars in the international market," Yadav said, adding that three others were arrested under India's tough anti-narcotics laws.

"As per officials of Narcotics Control Bureau and US Drugs Enforcement Administration of the US embassy in India, this is the biggest catch ever" of drugs used at raves and other large parties in the West, Yadav said.

Ephedrine, a stimulant, can be used as a base to make drugs such as ecstasy and other amphetamines, police said.

## Saddam's genocide trial revives Kurd anger

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's ousted leader Saddam Hussein will return to the dock today to face genocide charges in a highly-charged case that has revived bitter memories among the country's Kurdish minority.

The imprisoned strongman has been exercising and eating well in preparation for his appointment with the Iraqi High Tribunal, according to US officials, but he is not alone in awaiting the day with keen anticipation.

"I am waiting patiently to see him in court so that I can quench my thirst to see him humiliated," said Kurdish villager Abdullah Mohammed, who blames Saddam for the killing of his three daughters and his three brothers.

Saddam's second trial will see him and six co-defendants face a raft of charges related to the 1987-1988 Anfal campaign by Iraqi forces, in which an estimated 100,000 Kurds were slaughtered and 3,000 villages razed.

Proceedings are expected to last until the end of the year, unless they are interrupted by the results of the first case against Saddam over the killing of 148

Shia villagers from Dujail after an attempt on his life in 1982.

Judges in the Dujail case are due to announce their verdict on October 16. If Saddam is found guilty, he could be given the death penalty.

So, he would have an automatic right of appeal, but if he loses he could face a noose before the Anfal trial is complete.

The case against Saddam's co-defendants, former senior security officials in his regime, would continue however, as prosecutors seek to make the terrible events of 1988 at matter of legal record and heal some of Iraq's wounds.

"The evidence will essentially consist of the testimony of the complainants, testimony of witnesses, and a documentary phase," a US official close to the case said on condition of anonymity.

"There are a lot of documents in this case that truly connect the defendants of this case to the actions of the Anfal -- very appalling evidence consisting of mass graves where people were taken out to the desert and executed."



PHOTO: AFP

Female activists from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) hold bread as they take part in a demonstration in Lahore yesterday against price hike of foodstuffs.

## 11m illegal immigrants living in US

AFP, Washington

The number of illegal immigrants living in the United States likely rose from 10.5 million in January 2005 to 11 million in January 2006, according to a report released this week by the Department of Homeland Security. The figures were released as debate rages in the United States over illegal immigration, a topic expected to feature prominently in the race for November's legislative elections in the United States.

The estimate -- widely believed to be well below the real figure as undocumented people are likely to be among the least accurately counted -- was based primarily on the difference between the number of residents born abroad, tracked by the US Census Bureau, and the number of legal immigrants, tracked by the Department of Homeland Security.

Based on the results of the census in 2000 and 2005, the number of illegal immigrants jumped from 8.5 million to 10.5 million -- or 24 percent -- in five years. At that same pace, the number of legal immigrants would have hit 11 million by January 2006, the report noted.

## Pak aid group probed in UK terror plot

AP, London

A British government agency that oversees charities said Saturday it is looking into a report that several suspects in the alleged plot to bomb jetliners were linked by involvement with an aid group that raised money for Pakistani earthquake victims.

In Pakistan, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam said Saturday that a senior al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan masterminded the foiled plot, following similar accounts from Pakistani intelligence officials. Aslam refused to give the person's identity.

Pakistani intelligence officials allege the mastermind was in touch with Rashid Rauf, a Briton arrested in Pakistan and identified by that government as a "key person" in the plot. The officials claim Rauf recruited would-be bombers to take

part in a large-scale attack to mark the fifth anniversary of the Sept. 11 terror attack.

The Times newspaper said the aid group Crescent Relief London was founded in 2000 by Rauf's father, Abdul Rashid Rauf's brother, 22-year-old Tayib, has been detained by British police.

The newspaper said five suspects in the alleged plot were involved in the aid group's efforts to raise money for victims of last year's devastating earthquake in Pakistan. The Charity Commission, Britain's charity watchdog, said it had not opened a formal investigation but was evaluating the allegations.

"We are looking into the suggestions that have been made to decide what regulatory action may be required by us," the commission said in a statement.

No one answered the phone at Crescent Relief's offices Saturday, but The Times quoted director Ghanzafer Ali as saying he would welcome an inquiry by the charity commission. He said Abdul Rauf no longer worked with the group.

Mohammed Nazam, a friend of Abdul Rauf's in Birmingham, said he was not aware of Rauf's fundraising efforts, but added there was nothing suspicious about sending aid to Pakistan.

"When we send money to Kashmir, it does not mean we are funding terror," Nazam said.

He referred to a Himalayan region claimed by both India and Pakistan. The portion controlled by India has been mired in an insurgency by Islamic separatists that has seen more than 68,000 people killed since 1989.

## Malaysia ruling party warns split could cost power

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The party, which has ruled Malaysia since independence in 1957 could lose power over a dispute between the current prime minister and his predecessor, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak said.

Najib, who is also deputy president of the United Malays National Organisation (Umno), said the party must avoid a structural split to ensure it remains strong, the state Bernama news agency reported late Saturday.

"If the top (leaders) cause trouble, it will break the structure," Najib said.

"As long as we don't learn from history, we can repeat the mistakes. We don't want the dark history to happen again in the party."

Najib said Umno must remain united to continue as the backbone of the country's administration. It is the dominant member of the ruling National Front coalition.