

## Lanka govt, Tigers willing to talk, says Akashi

### Colombo agrees to expand truce monitoring

REUTERS, AFP, Brussels/Colombo

The Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tiger guerrillas have told Norwegian mediators they are willing to return to peace talks without conditions, Japan's peace envoy to the country said yesterday.

"We rejoice at the announcement conveyed by both the government and LTTE (guerrillas) to our Norwegian facilitator that they are willing to come to talks without any conditions," Yasushi Akashi told a news briefing.

Speaking after talks between the co-chairs of the Sri Lanka donors' group in Brussels, Akashi said the first step to talks would be for both sides to cease military action.

Earlier Tamil Tigers said they are

ready for talks with the government to halt a new episode of civil war, a top rebel leader said yesterday, but he warned violence would spread if army offensives continued.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) pulled out of peace talks indefinitely in April and a new bout of fighting erupted in late July, killing hundreds of troops, civilians and rebels in the worst violence since a 2002 ceasefire.

"The LTTE is ready for talks," Tiger political wing leader SP Thamilselvan told Reuters in an e-mail interview. "However, the opportunities for resuming the talks will be much stronger when the Sri Lankan government ceases its military attacks and all the (truce) articles are fully respected and imple-

mented."

Sri Lanka's military and the Tigers each accuse the other of trying to restart a two-decade civil war that has killed more than 65,000 people since 1983 and forced hundreds of thousands more to flee their homes.

More than 200,000 people have sought refuge in tented camps across the northeast in the past six weeks.

Both sides have mounted offensive operations during the latest bout of fighting. The military has captured rebel territory near the strategic northeastern port of Trincomalee and says it has overrun Tiger bunkers by the forward defence lines that separate the foes in the far north.

Diplomats and analysts see little effort from either side to defuse the renewed war, and many fear further escalation.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka has agreed to expand the peace monitoring mission in the war-torn country to include observers from other countries after Tamil Tiger rebels expelled European Union member states, an official said yesterday.

Defence spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said the island's main financial backers meeting in Brussels on Tuesday were expected to discuss expanding the depleted Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM).

"We are ready to work with anybody," Rambukwella said.



PHOTO: AFP

General view of the Convention Palace in Havana during the opening ceremony of the high officials' meeting in the framework of the XIV Non-Aligned Movement summit in Cuba on Monday. Representatives from most of the globe's developing nations began talks Monday at the summit that brings together leaders from about 50 developing nations, and high-level representatives from another 50, including some of the most outspoken foes of the United States, such as Iran, North Korea, Venezuela and Syria.

## No let up in Kashmir rights abuse: HRW

REUTERS, Srinagar

Human rights abuses by security forces and Muslim militants continue unchecked in Indian Kashmir despite a three-year-old peace process between India and Pakistan, a global human rights group said yesterday.

"Those abuses continue despite a tentative peace process... modest confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan, and a 2002 election of a state government with an avowed agenda to improve the human rights situation," Human Rights Watch said in a report released in Srinagar.

There was no immediate reaction to the report from government officials.

The 156-page report titled "Everyone Lives In Fear: Patterns of Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir" did not say whether abuses in the Himalayan region had increased or decreased since the India-Pakistan peace process started in January 2004.

## Helicopter crash in Russia kills 11

AFP, Moscow

At least 11 people, most of them high-ranking officers, died in a military helicopter crash near the Russian city of Vladikavkaz, officials said yesterday.

The Mi-8 transport helicopter crashed late Monday in a forest south of Vladikavkaz, in Russia's troubled North Caucasus region.

"Eleven people died and four have been hospitalised -- one in serious condition, one in less serious condition," Colonel Alexander Drobyshevsky, an aide to Russia's air force commander, said on NTV television. "The fate of one more serviceman is being checked."

Other officials were quoted by Russian news agencies as saying 12 people had been confirmed dead.

## Brown moving into 10 Downing Street

AFP, London

British finance minister Gordon Brown, long tipped to take over from Prime Minister Tony Blair, is finally to move into 10 Downing Street -- even if he hasn't got the top job yet, officials said yesterday.

The chancellor of the exchequer has strenuously denied that he is behind plotting to oust Blair, who was forced into saying last week that he would quit office within 12 months, having previously only said he would go before 2010.

The move is on police advice and with "the agreement and help" of Blair's office, a Treasury spokesman said.

## Court convicts 4 for '93 Mumbai bombings

REUTERS, Mumbai

An Indian court yesterday found four members of a Muslim family, including a woman, guilty in the 1993 bomb blasts in Mumbai that killed 257 people, the first convictions in one of the world's longest trials.

The Mumbai court found three other members of the Memon family accused in the case not guilty, public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam told reporters.

The verdicts against the remaining 116 defendants, including Bollywood star Sanjay Dutt, would be handed down in batches in the coming weeks, Nikam quoted judge PD Kode as saying.

Sentencing will be announced

after all the verdicts are delivered.

The Memons were among the main accused in the case.

The court had been due to deliver its judgment last month but put it off until Tuesday.

The series of 13 blasts in the country's financial hub, with targets including the Bombay Stock Exchange building, a cinema hall and a busy market, were the deadliest bomb attacks in India.

The trial, held in a court located inside a prison complex for security reasons, opened in 1994, but hearings began in earnest only the following year. A total of 686 witnesses have been heard over more than a decade.

## Developing states retool NAM for new era

AFP, Havana

Not aligned with whom? Developing countries in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are working to make their Cold War-era group a united front with a sharper focus: countering not two superpowers, but one.

Created in 1961, the NAM was meant to help members stand apart from the tense standoff between the Soviet Union and United States. But participants insist the movement is just as important in a new geopolitical context.

"We believe it is indispensable for us to close ranks in defending our rights. The risks, threats and

difficulties that we are facing are similar and with a common origin," Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Perez Roque said in his opening speech to the NAM summit here Monday, alluding to the United States.

"We must show our strength to the world, our ability to collectively cope with the enormous challenges imposed on us by a world governed by the most powerful," Perez Roque argued.

The six-day gathering brings together leaders from about 50 developing nations, and high-level representatives from dozens more, including some of the most outspoken foes of the United States, such

as Iran, North Korea, Venezuela and Syria.

Heads of state and government were slated to start their talks on Friday, after four days of preparatory meetings. Monday, Haiti and St Kitts and Nevis joined the movement, boosting its ranks to 118.

In a draft final summit document, NAM members appear determined to prove their movement is not out of date.

Members "stated their firm belief that the absence of two conflicting blocs in no way reduces the need to strengthen the NAM as a mechanism for the political coordination of underdeveloped countries," the draft says.

## Israeli court orders release of 18 Hamas lawmakers

AP, Ofer Military Base

An Israeli military court yesterday ordered the release of 18 Hamas lawmakers, including three Cabinet ministers.

Also, a spokesman for the outgoing Hamas-led administration said the group is prepared to back peace efforts with Israel as part of the new coalition government being formed by the Palestinians.

The men ordered released will remain behind bars for at least two more days pending an appeal by

prosecutors. The court is scheduled to issue a final ruling on Thursday.

The Israeli army arrested more than two dozen Hamas lawmakers since June after militants in Gaza linked to the group attacked a military post, capturing an Israeli soldier. The military court said the lawmakers should be freed on bail while their trials continue.

Palestinian leaders have said the detentions were illegal and demanded the freedom of the Hamas politicians.

Despite the apparent softening

of Hamas' violently anti-Israeli position, fighting early Tuesday between Israeli troops and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip raised doubts about a possible rapprochement.

Hamas gunmen, along with members of another militant group, battled troops operating near the border with Israel, killing one soldier, the army said. Israel has been carrying out operations inside Gaza since Hamas-linked militants tunneled into Israel in late June and captured an Israeli soldier.

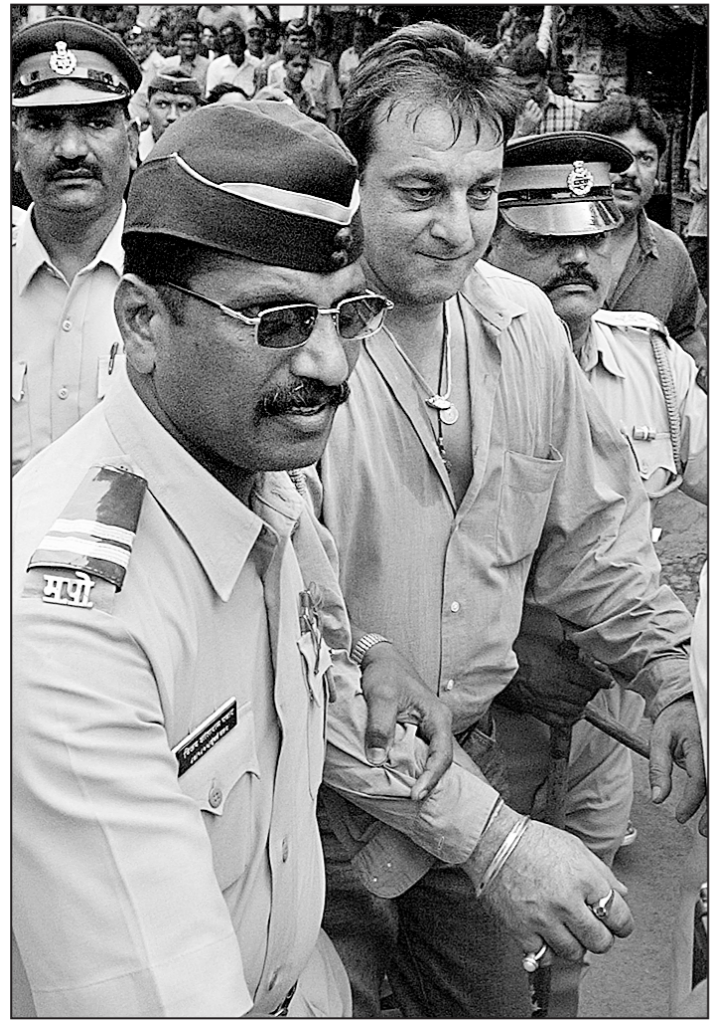


PHOTO: AFP

Indian policemen escort actor Sanjay Dutt as he comes out of the Terrorist And Disruptive Activities (Protection) Act (Tada) court during the first day of verdicts in the 1993 bomb attacks case in Mumbai yesterday. Three brothers of an alleged kingpin behind serial blasts in India's economic capital in 1993 that killed 257 people were convicted for their role in the attacks. Dutt, who is accused of receiving a gun from alleged plotters, faces a minimum of five years in jail if found guilty, his lawyer said.

## Iran, Syria must work with int'l community to be accepted: Annan

AFP, London

Iran and Syria must work with the international community if they want to cease being isolated from world affairs, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan said in an interview published in The Financial Times yesterday.

The two countries will "have to take some responsibilities", Annan told the newspaper.

The UN's top diplomat said that after meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad he concluded that the two "were very keen to be accepted... and have normal relations with the rest of the world."

In Annan's view, neither country was proud of its isolated status. "It is a question of having no choice... Syria's behaviour has isolated itself,

but I think it is bravado. Iran is very keen to be accepted and have normal relations with... the rest of the world."

The UN Security Council demanded Iran suspend uranium enrichment activities by August 31 or face the prospect of sanctions.

The US and European governments suspect Iran is pursuing a clandestine project to build atomic weapons, but Tehran insists its programme is designed purely for the generation of electricity.

Annan said, regarding the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme, he felt the world's powers and Iran were "headed for a confrontation, unless we find a way to get all the people to step back and reflect. But I am not sure how much room for flexibility either side is going to give."

## 25 civilians killed in Afghan offensive

### Thousands displaced

AFP, Kandahar

At least 25 Afghan civilians are believed to have been killed and 7,000 families displaced in a major Nato operation against Taliban rebels, rights and government officials said yesterday.

The casualties and refugees were from Panjwayi and Zhari districts, alleged Taliban strongholds in southern Kandahar province where Afghan and Nato-led troops launched Operation Medusa on September 2.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) says it has killed more than 500 insurgents and acknowledges there have been some civilian casualties although it says it is investigating how many.

People fleeing the battles and officials from the area had reported

that between 30 and 40 civilians had been killed, mainly in bombardments, said human rights official Shamsuddin Tanwir.

Although the government and Isaf had warned them to leave the area before Medusa was launched, many had not had enough time to do so, said Tanwir, from the Kandahar office of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Isaf dropped leaflets over the area informing people of the planned action and used local media and government officials to pass on the message.

Tanwir said his office planned to send people there once the operation was over to try to verify the numbers.

Panjwayi and Zhari are about 35km west of Kandahar, the biggest city in southern Afghanistan.

## New bird found in India after more than 50 yrs

REUTERS, New Delhi

A striking multi-coloured bird has been discovered in India's remote northeast, making it the first ornithological find in the country in more than half a century, experts said yesterday.

The Bugun Liocichla, scientifically known as Liocichla bugunorum, a kind of babbler, was discovered in May at the Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in India's hilly state of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering China.

The bird -- with olive and golden-yellow plumage, a black cap and flame-tipped wings -- is 20 cm (8 inches) in length and named after the Bugun tribespeople who live on the sanctuary's periphery.

Professional astronomer and keen birdwatcher, Ramana Athreya, who

discovered the bird said that although two Bugun Liocichlas were caught and examined at the sanctuary, both were released and no scientific specimen collected.

"We thought the bird was just too rare for one to be killed (for scientific study)," said Ramana.

"With today's modern technology, we could gather all the information we needed to confirm it as a new species. We took feathers and photographs, and recorded the bird's song."

Athreya wrote a paper, which was circulated among foreign and Indian experts including Pamela C Rasmussen, assistant curator of mammalogy and ornithology at Michigan State university, and author of The Ripley Guide of Birds of South Asia.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A Bugun Liocichla rests on the branch of a tree at Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh May 25, 2006. The striking multi-coloured Bugun Liocichla was discovered in India's remote northeast, making it the first ornithological find in the country in more than half a century, experts said on Tuesday.