



Sri Lankan activists take part in a protest in Colombo yesterday against World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies which they allege are causing more poverty in the developing world. The demonstration has been held to coincide with the IMF/World Bank meetings, which are taking place in Singapore.

# 'Lack of cash pushes Lanka to peace talks'

## 10 killed in fresh violence

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka appears to be dominating Tamil separatists on the battlefield, but a dwindling war chest may have forced it to enter peace talks ordered by foreign donors, analysts and diplomats say. "There is no doubt that the military enjoys the upper hand in current battles," says retired air force chief Harry Gunatillake. "But there is an economic compulsion to go for negotiations."

The government reluctantly accepted talks, marking a breakthrough in the Norwegian-led and internationally-backed peace process, after the South Asian island's main donors threatened to

pull the plug on much-needed aid. "Failure to cease hostilities, pursue a political settlement, respect human rights... could lead the international community to diminish its support," Sri Lanka's main financial backers said. The statement issued after a meeting of the United States, Japan, the European Union and Norway asked Colombo and the Tiger rebels to start talks in early October and be ready for a "progress review" by month's end. After initially denying that the government had agreed to unconditional talks, the island's peace secretariat which works with Norway later issued a statement Wednesday saying Colombo would

return to the negotiating table. The Tigers themselves have been calling for talks after accusing the military of killing civilians and destroying property. In fresh violence, at least 10 people have died in Sri Lanka, officials said yesterday, despite an agreement among the island's warring parties to talk peace. Three migrant workers from Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese community were gunned down in an open field in the town of Vavuniya, police said. The town borders territory held in the island's north by rebels from the minority Tamil population. "We initially suspected the victims were local Tamils, but other

labourers have now identified them as those who came here looking for work," a police official said. A recent upsurge in the fighting had reduced a Norwegian-arranged 2002 truce to tatters although both sides publicly declare that they will uphold the ceasefire. Analysts and diplomats agree that the military, after taking a severe beating from the Tigers since December, had turned the tide against the guerrillas in recent months. "The Sri Lankan armed forces appear to have had the better of the fighting in the last few weeks -- on land and at sea," says British High Commissioner Dominic Chilcott.

# US envoy sees Senate approving nuke deal with India

REUTERS, New Delhi

A controversial India-US nuclear cooperation deal is expected to be approved by a big majority in the Senate, which is likely to vote on it this month, Washington's envoy to New Delhi said on Wednesday. The deal, a sign of blossoming energy, commercial and strategic ties between the two countries, aims to overturn three decades of sanctions against New Delhi and supply atomic fuel and equipment to meet its spiralling energy needs. It was approved by a overwhelming majority in the US House of Representatives in July. But some experts feel the bill could face a tough time in the Senate due to objections by lawmakers who are vocal supporters of nuclear non-proliferation.

# Poland pledges 1,000 troops for Afghanistan

AFP, AP, Warsaw/ kabul

Poland will boost its military contingent in Afghanistan from 120 troops to about 1,000 by next February, Defence Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said yesterday in Washington. "From February 2007, we will have just over 1,000 soldiers in Afghanistan," he told Poland's TVN24 television. "We are going to participate in operations in eastern Afghanistan."

Polish officers will at the same time be integrated into the command structure of the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a defence ministry communique said. Poland's contingent in Afghanistan, currently 120 strong, is based in the northeastern town of Bagram, as will be the battalion arriving by February 2007, Sikorski said. Poland had already said in 2005 that it would boost its troop strength in strife-ridden Afghanistan to 1000

troops, though in June Sikorski revised the total to around 500. "The cost of the Afghanistan intervention is estimated at 300 million zlotys (72.5 million euros, 92 million dollars) and will be covered by Poland," the communique said. The new deployment of troops will not adversely effect Warsaw's commitment in Iraq, the statement said. Poland leads a contingent of 2000 troops -- including 880 of their own -- from 12 countries in Iraq.

# NAM demands Israel's Gaza pullout

AFP, Havana

The Non-Aligned Movement demanded at a summit in Havana Wednesday that Israel withdraw its troops from Gaza, release jailed Palestinian officials and repair damage caused by its military operations. A draft declaration to be adopted by leaders of the NAM countries also expresses "grave concern about the deterioration of the situation ... in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of the unlawful policies and practices being carried out by Israel."

Ministers preparing the full summit, which starts on Friday, agreed late Wednesday on a document that condemned Israel for what they called "the continuing killing and injury of Palestinian civilians by excessive and indiscriminate force, targeted attacks and extrajudicial executions." They also called "for the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from within the Gaza Strip, for Israel to fulfil its responsibility to repair damage caused to the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and for the immediate release of all Palestinian officials detained by Israel."



Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid bin Syed Jaafar Albar (L) delivers a speech in Havana Wednesday during the inauguration of the Foreign Ministers' meeting within the framework of the XIV Non-Aligned Movement Summit.

# Congress gets boost as Munda quits as CM of Jharkhand

REUTERS, Ranchi

India's ruling Congress party and their allies were poised to strengthen their grip over the country's states yesterday after the resignation of a chief minister belonging to the main opposition party. The chief minister of Jharkhand, Arjun Munda of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), quit as he was unable to muster a majority in the 82-member assembly after more than a week of political turmoil sparked by corruption claims.

# Pakistan delays bill to reform rape laws

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistan government yesterday stepped up efforts to win larger parliamentary support for a bill to amend the Islamic rape laws, after delaying its presentation to the lower house for approval. The Women Protection Bill was on the agenda of the national assembly on Wednesday but was not moved by the government, which said it wanted to garner support from all parties in parliament.

# Few expectations from Indo-Pak talks in Cuba

REUTERS, New Delhi

A long-awaited summit meeting between the leaders of India and Pakistan this week, their first in a year, is not expected to produce any dramatic breakthroughs with both sides facing domestic political pressure. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf are due to hold talks at the weekend of the sidelines of a summit of Non-Aligned Movement nations in Cuba, hoping to reignite peace moves that have sputtered to a halt.

They would be considered to have made progress if they set a schedule to revive formal negotiations between their diplomats, called off by New Delhi after the July 11 train bombings in Mumbai, officials and analysts said. "Looking at what is happening inside Pakistan and the responses that have come from Musharraf about India's concerns on terrorism, I do not expect any major breakthrough," said C Uday Bhaskar of New Delhi's Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

