

New front opens in Lanka after big military losses

Senior US official to visit Colombo to push for peace

AFP, REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's military and the Tamil rebels opened a new front in the east after a fierce battle in the north killed 130 soldiers, casting a shadow over peace talks later this month.

Troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) blamed each other for the new flareup in the eastern district of Ampara, which followed heavy fighting on the Jaffna peninsula on Wednesday.

"LTTE terrorists launched artillery and mortar shells towards the police Special Task Force (STF) defences," at Kandijkudiaru in Ampara, the defence ministry said.

"The Liberation Tigers fighters were engaged in defensive clashes with the STF troopers, according to the Tiger political chief of Ampara district," the pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website said.

There were no reports of casualties in the overnight artillery exchanges, which began late Thursday.

The LTTE had Thursday handed over 74 bodies of government soldiers killed in the Jaffna battle. Another soldier's body was returned Friday, raising the death toll among troops to 130.

The army casualties in Wednesday's battle were the worst suffered by troops in a single battle since a Norwegian-brokered truce agreed in February 2002.

The military claimed it killed over 200 Tigers but the guerrillas said they lost 22 men, revising up their earlier claim of 10 dead.

"The (main) handover took place yesterday evening at 8 p.m. local time at Omantai checkpoint on the A-9 road," said the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which acted as intermediary.

Omantai, 260km north of Colombo, marks the de facto border separating government and rebel-held territory and lies just north of Vavuniya.

An explosion in the government-held town killed a soldier and wounded two more Friday, police said, blaming the LTTE. Unidentified gunmen also shot dead two men in Vavuniya.

US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher and two other foreign envoys will visit Sri Lanka next week to seek a halt to a rash of fierce fighting that threatens to derail peace talks, officials said on Friday.

Boucher's visit, due to start Thursday, comes as the government

and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fight nearly daily artillery battles in the island's far north.

"He is coming to show support for the peace talks and call for an immediate cessation of hostilities," an official at the US embassy in Colombo said.

The heavy bloodshed cast a shadow over peace talks planned to be held in Switzerland in late October. Britain, Sri Lanka's former colonial power, urged both sides to resume negotiations.

"Our firm view is that dialogue, not violence, is the only viable route to resolving the conflict," the British High Commission said in its annual human rights report released Thursday.

The report also accused both the government and the Tamil Tigers of killing civilians.

Despite the ongoing violence, diplomats said Norway, the top peace broker in Sri Lanka, was planning to dispatch special envoy Jon Hanssen-Bauer Tuesday to work out details for the peace talks set for October 28 and 29.

Suicide bomb kills Nato soldier, 8 Afghans

AFP, Kandahar

A suicide car bomb hit a Nato convoy in Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar yesterday, killing a foreign soldier and eight civilians in the latest in a campaign of Taliban attacks.

The US convoy was travelling through town to a nearby area where International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) soldiers killed 20 Taliban insurgents a day earlier in a battle involving artillery and war planes.

"A vehicle-borne suicide bomber killed eight Afghan civilians in an attack on an Isaf convoy travelling in Kandahar City," an Isaf statement said, adding that two Isaf soldiers and several civilians were also wounded.

One of the troops died later in hospital, it said. The statement did not give the soldier's nationality but Isaf officials said earlier the bomb had hit a US convoy.

The car used for the attack was totally destroyed and lay in pieces at the site, an AFP reporter said. Blood was spattered on the road and sidewalks, while three nearby shops were on fire and 10 others were damaged.

UK troops worsen problems in Iraq Says British army chief

REUTERS, London

Britain's top army commander said the presence of British troops in Iraq was exacerbating security problems on the ground and they should be withdrawn soon.

In an interview with the Daily Mail newspaper, General Richard Dannatt criticised post-war planning for the 2003 US-led invasion and said the British presence in Iraq also hurt British security interests abroad, which British Prime Minister Tony Blair has repeatedly denied.

The public criticism by Dannatt, extraordinary for a serving officer of his rank, was seized on by critics of the war in Iraq and Dannatt conducted a series of television and radio interviews on Friday trying to calm the storm he had triggered.

He insisted he had said "nothing new or noteworthy" and was just repeating policy.

"It was never my intention to have this hoo ha, which people have thoroughly enjoyed overnight, trying to suggest there is a chasm between myself and the prime minister," he told BBC radio.

In the Daily Mail interview he said: "I think history will show that the planning for what happened after the initial successful war

fighting phase was poor, probably based more on optimism than sound planning."

"I don't say that the difficulties we are experiencing round the world are caused by our presence in Iraq but undoubtedly our presence in Iraq exacerbates them."

Britain should "get ... out sometime soon because our presence exacerbates the security problems," he said.

In his subsequent radio and television interviews, he said he was not suggesting an immediate withdrawal.

"I'm a soldier. We don't do surrender. We don't pull down white flags. We're going to see this through," he said.

"But we've got to get on with it. We can't be there for years and years."

His remark that British forces exacerbate violence in some parts of Iraq was simply stating the obvious, he said. He added that in places, like Basra, they were still providing benefits.

But he also said ambitions had to be lowered from the expectations of a few years ago, and were now mainly focused on keeping Iraq from splitting up.



Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee Ole Danbolt Mjoes holds a photograph of Dr Muhammad Yunus after announcing the Peace Prize yesterday in Oslo. Bangladesh's Dr Yunus, dubbed the "Banker to the Poor", and founder of the Grameen Bank, which doled out small-scale loans to more than six million borrowers won the Nobel Peace Prize.



(L to R) European Commission President Spanish Jose Manuel Barroso, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and European Union Foreign Policy Chief Spanish Javier Solana shake hands yesterday in Helsinki during the EU-India Summit.

India-EU summit begins in Helsinki

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Helsinki

India and the European Union, which are bound by a strategic partnership, opened their seventh summit in Helsinki yesterday with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh calling the relations "extremely important".

"India and EU are two of the largest democracies in the world. Our relationship to EU is very special. We consider strategic partnership between India and EU as extremely important," he said in comments to the Finnish media ahead of the inaugural at Finlandia Hall.

Among the subjects Manmohan Singh will discuss with EU leaders are those related to energy, environment, greater business prospects, terrorism and international issues of common interest, said Indian officials.

The first India-EU summit was held in Lisbon in 2000 and the last in New Delhi in 2005. Besides India, the EU has strategic relations with only five other countries - the US, Russia, Canada, Japan and Russia.

The EU as a bloc of 25 nations is India's largest trading partner and one of the largest sources of FDI for India.

North Korean ships scramble to pack as Japan slaps ban

AFP, Tokyo

North Koreans crammed boats with bicycles, appliances and other goods they could get their hands on as they scrambled to leave Japan yesterday under a ban imposed over Pyongyang's nuclear test.

Japan banned all visits by ships and all imports from the impoverished communist state as of midnight Friday (1500 GMT).

Twenty-two North Korean ships were docked in Japan when the ban was announced, officials said. Eleven of them were in Sakai, which Friday snapped off a symbolic sister-city agreement with the major North Korean port of Wonsan.

"The crew members seem to be in a hurry loading lots of goods as they have to leave today," said Yasutake Nakamura, an official at the port management unit in Sakai, which is in western Tottori prefecture.

In one cargo ship, crew members were working hard binding a huge mountain of second-hand bicycles to the sides on the deck board.

Seafood, second-hand bicycles

and tailored suits were among the key products in North Korea's limited trade with Japan.

"Today's the last day for me to pass goods to North Korean ships. I hurried to come here," a 53-year-old trader of used tyres was quoted as saying in the Nihon Keizai Shimbun business daily's evening edition.

From early morning, dozens of trucks entered and left without stop at a quay in Sakai for foreign ships.

Bilateral trade has already been severely restricted and subject to boycotts due to political tensions.

North Korea in 2002 admitted it had kidnapped Japanese civilians in the 1970s and 1980s, provoking fury.

"North Korean marine products are unpopular now, so they've been replaced by Norwegian and Japanese," Nakamura said.

"I've heard most marine products from North Korea have disappeared from retailers' outlets in recent weeks," he said.

N Korea, Iran want talks with US

AP, Vienna

North Korea says it wants to talk. Ditto Iran. So why is America saying no?

With both Pyongyang and Tehran seemingly immune to pressure over their nuclear programmes, the view that it's time to shelve confrontation and try negotiation is gaining credence.

But the risks involved in sitting down with two members of President Bush's "Axis of Evil" have left Washington resisting calls from Pyongyang and Tehran for one-on-one negotiations.

In the case of North Korea, Bush administration officials have pointed to the failures of the Clinton era. Bush himself has rebuffed the idea. Telling reporters he wanted to stick to engaging Pyongyang multilaterally, he said Wednesday: "One has a stronger hand when there's more people playing your same cards."

America was talking with the leadership in Pyongyang as

recently as seven years ago. In 1999 President Clinton agreed to the first major easing of economic sanctions against the North since the end of the Korean war in 1953 if the communist nation delivered on its promise of giving up aspirations to own nuclear weapons.

But the North quickly seized on delays in US promises of help in developing a peaceful nuclear industry. By July 2000, it threatened to restart its nuclear programme. Three years later it withdrew from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and kicked out UN nuclear inspectors, blinding the world and allowing it to move forward with its weapons development and its claimed bomb test Monday.

Where Iran is concerned, the Americans also have embraced a multination approach, agreeing earlier this year to join five other world powers in talking to Tehran if it agrees to give up uranium enrichment. But that strategy has its weaknesses.

Investigators seek clues in NY plane crash

AP, New York

Their flight path was exhilarating, south along the Hudson River, a loop around the Statue of Liberty and north, up the East River with stunning views of the Manhattan skyline.

New York Yankee pitcher Cory Lidle's plane started making a U-turn about a quarter-mile from a crop of residential towers. Its propellers were still turning when the plane slammed into a luxury high-rise, killing him and his flight instructor.

On Thursday, National Transportation Safety Board officials looked for clues into what caused the crash.

"The reason the NTSB is here is to learn from this accident and to make sure this doesn't happen again," spokeswoman Debbie Hersman said.



Residents flee with their belongings in the outskirts of Mandalay in central Myanmar Thursday. The death toll in widespread flooding which has left thousands homeless in Myanmar and Thailand rose to 63 as water began to recede.

13 killed in Israeli raids on Gaza in last 24-hr

AFP, Gaza City

Three Hamas militants were killed yesterday in an Israeli air strike as the army pressed on with a deadly offensive in the Gaza Strip amid deadlocked efforts on forming a Palestinian unity government.

The deaths brought to 13 the number of Palestinians killed by the military in Gaza since the army launched its latest ground incursion early on Thursday, concentrated in the southern part of the territory.

The three militants loyal to ruling Islamist movement Hamas - including a local leader in the military wing - were killed in an air strike on their vehicle in the northern town of Beit Lahiya, a local medic and witnesses said.

The Israeli military confirmed an

attack on a vehicle it said was transporting weapons. Medics said another five Palestinians were wounded.

Hamas's Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades was one of three groups to claim the June 25 abduction of an Israeli soldier that sparked a wider four-month offensive in the Gaza Strip where around 250 Palestinians have died since then.

On Friday, a 29-year-old woman was shot dead by soldiers operating in the south and another Palestinian died overnight from wounds suffered during an air strike against the house of a Hamas militant.

The army has said its latest operation was targeting "tunnels and other terror threats".

A spokesman said troops had killed one of two gunmen in south-

ern Gaza, but when questioned about the death of a woman, he said only that the army had "heard such claims" and was "checking".

Israel's prolonged operations in Gaza have the stated goals of retrieving captured Corporal Gilad Shalit and stopping militant rocket attacks on the Jewish state.

Since the offensive began on June 28, around 250 Palestinians and two Israeli soldiers have died in the Gaza Strip, according to an AFP count.

Internal Palestinian tensions have also soared amid deadlocked efforts to form a national unity government as a means to ending unprecedented financial and political crisis since Hamas formed a government last March.



Britain's Leader of the Commons Jack Straw (Centre L) meets members of the Muslim community at Bangor road community centre in Blackburn, in north-west England yesterday.

List of Nobel Peace Prize winners since 1901

AFP, Oslo

Here is the full list of Nobel Peace Prize laureates from 1901, when the prize was first awarded:

- 2006: Muhammad Yunus (Bangladesh) and the Grameen Bank
- 2005: International Atomic Energy Agency and Mohamed ElBaradei (Egypt)
- 2004: Wangari Maathai (Kenya)
- 2003: Shirin Ebadi (Iran)
- 2002: Jimmy Carter (US)
- 2001: Kofi Annan (Ghana) and the United Nations
- 2000: Kim Dae Jung (South Korea)
- 1999: Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders)
- 1998: John Hume and David Trimble (Northern Ireland)
- 1997: Jody Williams (US) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines
- 1996: Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and Jose Ramos Horta (East Timor)
- 1995: Joseph Rotblat (Britain) and the Pugwash movement
- 1994: Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres (Israel) and Yasser Arafat (PLO)
- 1993: Nelson Mandela and Frederik de Klerk (South Africa)
- 1992: Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemala)
- 1991: Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma)
- 1990: Mikhail Gorbachev (Soviet Union)
- 1989: Dalai Lama (Tibet)
- 1988: United Nations Peacekeeping Forces
- 1987: Oscar Arias Sanchez (Costa Rica)
- 1986: Elie Wiesel (US)
- 1985: International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War
- 1984: Desmond Tutu (South Africa)
- 1983: Lech Walesa (Poland)
- 1982: Alva Myrdal (Sweden) and Alfonso Garcia Robles (Mexico)
- 1981: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- 1980: Adolfo Perez Esquivel (Argentina)
- 1979: Mother Teresa (Albania)
- 1978: Anwar Sadat (Egypt) and Menachem Begin (Israel)
- 1977: Amnesty International
- 1976: Betty Williams (Britain) and Mairead Corrigan (Northern Ireland)
- 1975: Andrei Sakharov (Soviet Union)
- 1974: Sean MacBride (Ireland) and Eisaku Sato (Japan)
- 1973: Henry Kissinger (US) and Le Duc Tho (Vietnam, declined)
- 1972: Reserved
- 1971: Willy Brandt (Germany)
- 1970: Norman Borlaug (US)
- 1969: International Labour Organisation
- 1968: Rene Cassin (France)
- 1967: Reserved
- 1966: Reserved
- 1965: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- 1964: Martin Luther King Jr (US)
- 1963: International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies
- 1962: Linus Carl Pauling (US)
- 1961: Dag Hammarskjold (Sweden)
- 1960: Albert Lutuli (South Africa)
- 1959: Philip Noel-Baker (Britain)
- 1958: Georges Pire (Belgium)
- 1957: Lester Pearson (Canada)
- 1956: Reserved
- 1955: Reserved
- 1954: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- 1953: George Marshall (US)
- 1952: Albert Schweitzer (France)
- 1951: Leon Jouhaux (France)
- 1950: Ralph Bunche (US)
- 1949: Lord (John) Boyd Orr of Brechin (Britain)
- 1948: Reserved
- 1947: Friends Service Council (The Quakers), American Friends Service Committee (The Quakers)
- 1946: Emily Greene Balch (US), John Raleigh Mott (US)
- 1945: Cordell Hull (US)
- 1944: International Committee of the Red Cross
- 1943: Reserved
- 1942: Reserved
- 1941: Reserved
- 1940: Reserved
- 1939: Reserved
- 1938: Nansen International Office for Refugees
- 1937: Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (Britain)
- 1936: Carlos Saavedra Lamas (Argentina)
- 1935: Carl von Ossietzky (Germany)
- 1934: Arthur Henderson (Britain)
- 1933: Sir Norman Angell (Raiph Lane) (Britain)
- 1932: Reserved
- 1931: Jane Addams (US) and Nicholas Murray Butler (US)
- 1930: Nathan Soederblom (Sweden)
- 1929: Frank Billings Kellogg (US)
- 1928: Reserved
- 1927: Ferdinand Buisson (France) and Ludwig Quide (Germany)
- 1926: Aristide Briand (France) and Gustav Stresemann (Germany)
- 1925: Sir Austen Chamberlain (Britain) and Charles Gates Dawes (US)
- 1924: Reserved
- 1923: Reserved
- 1922: Fridtjof Nansen (Norway)
- 1921: Karl Hjalmar Branting (Sweden) and Christian Lous Lange (Norway)
- 1920: Leon Victor Auguste Bourgeois (France)
- 1919: Thomas Woodrow Wilson (US)
- 1918: Reserved
- 1917: International Committee of the Red Cross
- 1916: Reserved
- 1915: Reserved
- 1914: Reserved
- 1913: Henri La Fontaine (Belgium)
- 1912: Elihu Root (US)
- 1911: Tobias Michael Carel Asser (The Netherlands) and Alfred Hermann Fried (Austria)
- 1910: Permanent International Peace Bureau
- 1909: Auguste Marie Francois Beernaert (Belgium) and Paul Henri Benjamin Balluet, Baron d'Estournelles de Constant de Rebecque (France)
- 1908: Klas Pontus Arnoldson (Sweden) and Fredrik Bajer (Denmark)
- 1907: Ernesto Teodoro Moneta (Italy) and Louis Renault (France)
- 1906: Theodore Roosevelt (US)
- 1905: Baroness Bertha Sophie Felicitia von Suttner (Austria)
- 1904: Institute of International Law
- 1903: William Randal Cremer (Britain)
- 1902: Elie Ducommun (Switzerland) and Charles Albert Gobat (Switzerland)
- 1901: Jean Henri Dunant (Switzerland) and Frederic Passy (France)