

LTTE threatens govt with island-wide war

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers threatened yesterday to extend their battle against government troops across the island if Colombo "wants a war", as the navy said they killed 20 rebels in sea clashes.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was prepared to accept war or peace and was awaiting the government's move on the future of the conflict, rebel military spokesman Rasiyah Ilanthiriyar told AFP.

"If the Sri Lankan government wants a war, they will have it every where in the island," Ilanthiriyar said by satellite telephone from the rebel-held north. "If they want peace, Tamil people must feel they have peace," he said.

The rebels, fighting for a separate homeland for the Tamil minority

in a conflict that has claimed thousands of lives, upped the rhetoric Saturday ahead of next weekend's peace talks to try to restore a 2002 ceasefire.

Peace broker Norway clinched a deal Thursday to resume stalled negotiations in Switzerland in a bid to resurrect the peace process, amid an upsurge in violence that has killed more than 2,300 people since December.

The negotiations were salvaged despite bloody rebel attacks this week including on the southern port of Galle, a popular tourist spot. The three-decade-old conflict has largely been waged in the north and east of this Sinhalese majority country.

Meanwhile Saturday, the Sri Lankan navy said it had killed at least 20 Tamil Tigers and destroyed two rebel boats during a sea battle off the northern peninsula of Jaffna

late Friday.

"Naval troops destroyed two Sea Tiger boats, killing 20 Sea Tiger cadres, and inflicted heavy damages to other boats during retaliatory fire," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The state-run media said as many as 35 Tigers were killed.

The LTTE rejected the claim, saying no fighters or boats were lost in the clash, the latest in a series of deadly exchanges in the waters off the island.

"There was no loss of men or material on either side," Ilanthiriyar said.

"Our boats were on a routine exercise when the Sri Lankan navy tried to interfere with them."

The navy also reported at least six Tigers were killed and two boats were destroyed when the rebels tried to storm another naval base in

northwest Jaffna peninsula early Saturday.

The claims by both sides could not be independently verified.

Reports of Friday's naval battle came as visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Richard Boucher, urged both sides to "lower the temperatures" and enter talks.

Sri Lanka's navy was the target of two suicide bombings this week, including an attack in the northern town of Habarana Monday that killed at least 115 sailors waiting to board buses for home.

On Wednesday, suspected rebel suicide bombers using at least five boats attacked a key naval base in Galle, detonating powerful explosions that killed at least two people and wounded 26, officials and the police said.

'No decisions' yet on 2008 White House race, says Hillary

AFP, New York

US Senator Hillary Clinton says she has made "no decisions" as yet about running for the US presidency.

Her comments came late Friday during her first-ever debate against the Republican challenger for her US Senate seat -- an event nominally about next month's congressional election, but which focused largely on the former first lady's possible 2008 White House bid.

"Obviously, people are talking about whether I will or should be running for president, and I'm flattered by that," Clinton said when asked if she would serve an entire six-year term if re-elected to her Senate seat.

"If that is a concern for people, they should factor that into their decision in November. But I have made no decisions," she said.



Pakistani policemen gather at the site of the blast following a bomb explosion in Peshawar Friday. A bomb planted beneath a vendor's cart ripped through a crowd in the northwest Pakistani city of Peshawar, killing nine people and injuring dozens of others.



OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (C) gestures during a meeting with Iraqi clerics in Makkah Friday. Iraqi Shia and Sunni clerics' meeting in Islam's holiest city signed a text calling for a halt to sectarian bloodletting in war-torn Iraq.

US, Britain mull eight Iraq options

AFP, London

London and Washington are discussing a range of eight options to tackle escalating violence in Iraq, the Guardian newspaper reported yesterday.

Courses of action being considered include a phased withdrawal, the break-up of Iraq into a federal model and "one last push" -- a short-term injection of troops to create enough security to build confidence in the Iraqi government, the paper said. The report comes as US President George W Bush was to meet US generals Saturday to discuss strategy amid a spike of violence in the troubled

country that has seen 75 US troops killed in October alone.

The immediate withdrawal of coalition troops seems unlikely, the Guardian reported, quoting an unnamed Foreign Office diplomat saying: "We could pull out now and leave them to their fate but the place would implode."

An early exit would also constitute "an unpalatable humiliation" for the Bush administration, the paper added.

However, it did suggest that British forces in the area would likely be slashed by half in the middle of next year, followed by further reductions later.

N Korea cools tension as Rice leaves region

REUTERS, Beijing

The North Korea crisis appeared to have come off the boil yesterday after reports that Pyongyang had backed away from conducting further nuclear tests.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ended a three-nation Asian tour to rally support for UN sanctions on North Korea over its October 9 nuclear test, flying out of Beijing for Moscow.

She told reporters before leaving that North Korea's tone was still belligerent, and it was not clear if the unpredictable communist state was serious about

returning to talks on winding up its nuclear arms programme that broke down a year ago.

But Kim Kye-gwan, North Korea's top nuclear negotiator, told the ABC network's "Good Morning America" on Friday that Pyongyang hoped to return to the talks.

A report that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il had told a Chinese envoy no more nuclear tests were planned further raised hopes that the crisis was cooling.

"I understand he expressed clearly there was no plan to conduct nuclear tests," South Korea's Yonhap news agency quoted a

diplomatic source as saying.

Japanese news agency Kyodo quoted Foreign Minister Taro Aso as saying he had information, although not confirmed, that Kim had said he would not conduct another test.

Rice's visits to Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing were overshadowed by speculation that North Korea would conduct another nuclear test, but Kim Kye-gwan ducked the question in the ABC interview.

"I think you can closely watch what happens," he said. "We've not said there will be another test. Others have said that."

'Makkah call for end to Iraq killing may go unheard'

AFP, Dubai

The appeal from Islam's holiest city by Iraqi Sunni and Shia religious leaders for an end to sectarian killing in the strife-torn country risks going unheard, analysts believe.

The 10-point "Makkah Document" was issued by 29 clerics from both sides of Iraq's religious divide when they gathered Friday in Saudi Arabia during Ramadan under an initiative by the 57-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The document draws on verses of the Quran and sayings of the

Prophet Mohammed, and stipulates that "spilling Muslim blood is forbidden".

It also calls for safeguarding the two communities' holy places, defending the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq and the release of "all innocent detainees".

The declaration was welcomed as "a positive step" Saturday by Adnan al-Dulaimi, who heads the National Concord Front, the largest Sunni bloc in the Iraqi parliament.

"We call on the authorities, the parties, the tribes and religious leaders to stick to the declaration and to support it," Dulaimi told a

Baghdad news conference.

"The government has a major role to play in implementing the document, especially with regard to freeing prisoners," he said.

But according to Abdel Bari Atwan, editor-in-chief of the London-based Arabic daily Al-Quds Al-Arabi, the religious leaders' appeal for the bloodshed to cease is likely to fall on deaf ears.

"Despite its doubly symbolic character, this appeal will suffer the same fate as the one issued after last November's Cairo conference, held under the aegis of the Arab League," Atwan told AFP.

'Pakistan facing terror threats from within'

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said his country did not face any external threat but threats from within in the form of extremism and terrorism and was pursuing a holistic strategy to fight them.

He also regretted that incidents of terrorism and extremism anywhere somehow had linkages with Pakistan that disturbed the whole world.

"We have to control them, we must fight extremism and terrorism from our society, we must suppress extremism," he said in an interview to PTI.

Musharraf said said after the

9/11 events, there were external centrifugal forces in the shape of Al-Qaeda and now the Taliban activities and his government was pursuing a multi-pronged strategy against them.

Apart from these, he said there were also internal "centrifugal forces" such as provincial disharmony and the government was taking steps to bring about inter-provincial harmony in the country.

Replying to questions, he declined to comment on statements emanating from New Delhi or join issue with what was being raised by Indian media and said his aim was to "galvanise" the peace process between the two countries.



File photo dated May 6 shows British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking and his wife Elaine in Paris. Hawking, 64, is to divorce his second wife after eleven years of marriage. The Daily Telegraph reported on October 20, citing papers lodged with the Cambridge county court.

Hawking to divorce from second wife

AFP, London

Acclaimed British physicist Stephen Hawking is to divorce his second wife after eleven years of marriage. The Daily Telegraph reported yesterday.

Citing papers lodged with the Cambridge county court, the newspaper reported that Hawking, 64, will divorce his wife, Elaine, because of the breakdown of their marriage.

Hawking married Elaine, a nurse hired by his former wife to help him deal with his crippling motor neuron disease, in 1995, after divorcing in 1991 his first wife Jane, with whom he was married for 26 years and had three children.

Scientists create cloak of invisibility

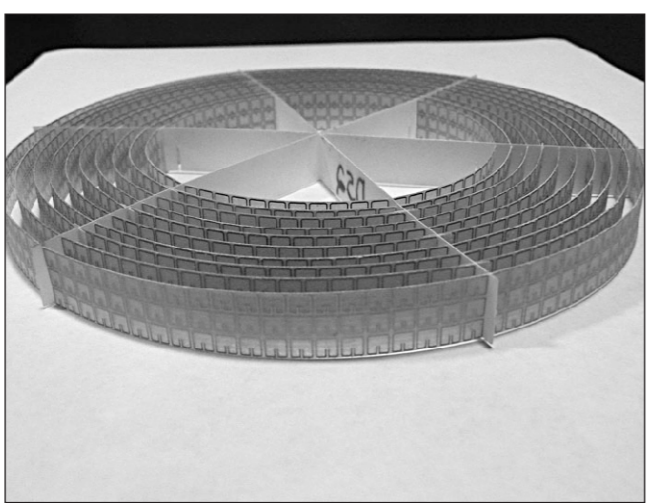
AP, Washington

Scientists are boldly going where only fiction has gone before to develop a Cloak of Invisibility. It isn't quite ready to hide a Romulan space ship from Capt James T Kirk or to disguise Harry Potter, but it is a significant start and could show the way to more sophisticated designs.

In this first successful experiment, researchers from the United States and England were able to cloak a copper cylinder.

It's like a mirage, where heat causes the bending of light rays and cloaks the road ahead behind an image of the sky.

"We have built an artificial mirage that can hide something from would-be observers in any direction," said cloak designer David Schurig, a research associate in Duke University's electrical and computer engineering department.



Handout photo of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina shows an "invisibility cloak". For fans of the fictional Harry Potter, US and British scientists have demonstrated a working "invisibility cloak" that could, in time, make wearers disappear. Initial tests focused on making objects invisible to microwaves, but the scientists said the same principles could theoretically apply to visible frequencies, making a true invisibility cloak like storybook hero Potter's possible.

7 rebels killed in fresh Kashmir gunbattles

AFP, REUTERS, Srinagar

Indian troops killed seven suspected Islamic militants in an operation to seek out rebels in revolt-hit Kashmir, police said yesterday.

"The seven were killed during separate operations in Doda, Baramulla and Kupwara districts during Friday night," a police spokesman said.

Doda is situated south of summer capital Srinagar, while Baramulla and Kupwara are in the north and border Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

Police said one of the slain rebels was functioning as "sectional commander" of the region's most powerful group Hizbul Mujahedin.

"Three of the militants killed in

Baramulla district were believed to have infiltrated into our (Indian) side from the Pakistani side a few days back," an army spokesman said.

Kashmir is in the grip of a 17-year Islamic separatist insurgency that has left more than 44,000 people dead by the official count.

Meanwhile, an Indian soldier shot dead three colleagues at a security camp in troubled Kashmir after an argument before attempting to kill himself, an army spokesman said on Saturday.

The shooting, the latest in a string of such incidents in the strife-torn region, took place on Friday night in Rajouri district, southwest of Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

Somali, Ethiopian troops capture town from Islamists

AFP, Mogadishu

Somali government troops backed by Ethiopian forces yesterday captured a town near a government base in south central Somalia after heavy clashes with Islamic militia, residents and commanders said.

They said heavily-armed government troops aboard battle wagons -- pickup trucks mounted with machine guns -- attacked the town of Burahakaba, about 60km south-east of Baidoa.

The attack sparked clashes with the local militia loyal to Al Bayan Islamic Court movement, who were forced to retreat, the sources said.

"The holy warriors in Burahakaba exchanged fire with Ethiopian Tigray forces and their Somali sympathisers this morning (after which) they took control of the

town," said Sheikh Mukhtar Robow, the deputy security chief in the Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia.

Robow added that the Islamic militia lost a battle wagon in the retreat. Reports of casualties remained unclear.

But a government commander said his forces met no resistance when they rode into the trading post that lies in Bay region, which is under control of the state.

"Our forces are conducting some security operations here (in Burahakaba) as well as other areas in our control. So far, we haven't met any resistance," said Hirsi Dhere, who oversaw the seizure, told AFP by phone.