



Anton Balasingham

Terminally ill Tiger peace negotiator laments fate of Tamils

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger peace negotiator Anton Balasingham has confirmed he has terminal cancer but that it is "minor" compared to the "immense suffering" of Sri Lanka's minority Tamils, a report said yesterday.

The London-based Anton Balasingham, 68, who was diagnosed with bile duct cancer last week, also said he was sad that his illness prevented him from contributing to the cause of minority Tamils at home.

"It is an unfortunate personal tragedy," Balasingham said of his illness.

"When compared to the vast ocean of the collective tragedy faced by my people, my illness is merely a pebble," he was quoted as saying by the pro-rebel tamilnet.com website.

"I am deeply sad that I am crippled by this illness, unable to contribute anything substantial towards the alleviation of the immense suffering and oppression of my people."

The chief editor of the Tamil newspapers Sudar Oli and Uthayan, Nadesapillai Vithyatharan, met with Balasingham in London last week and said he had come to terms with his condition.

"He is in pain but has not lost his sense of humour. He joked that only his brain and the transplanted kidney are not affected by the cancer," Vithyatharan told AFP.

Sri Lanka's top peace broker Erik Solheim is due to visit Balasingham in London early next month.

Hu seeks to cement close Pakistan ties

REUTERS, Islamabad

Chinese President Hu Jintao arrived in Pakistan yesterday for a visit that is expected to cement the old friends' "all-weather relationship" that was for decades underpinned by their mutual hostility towards India.

Hu arrived from India where he agreed with leaders to double trade and work to resolve border disputes. He will be keen to demonstrate China's steadfast support for Pakistan despite the warming Indian ties, analysts said.

"There's a redefining of the relationship. The Chinese are demonstrating they're keen to have strong relations with both Pakistan and India," said former Pakistani foreign secretary Tanvir Ahmad Khan. "This is partly because China does not want to leave the South Asian sub-continent to other external powers."

"They'll try to demonstrate that

friendship with India is not at the expense of Pakistan," he said.

Hu's visit is the first by a Chinese president in a decade and marks the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations, which Khan described as Pakistan's most stable.

The constancy of their friendship contrasts sharply with the on-off relationship Pakistan has had with the United States.

"China is the only country, when it comes to the national security of Pakistan, which Islamabad trusts. No one else," said Tarique Niazi, an analyst at the University of Wisconsin, who has written extensively on Sino-Pakistan relations.

For the past five years, Pakistan has been a US ally in a global war on terrorism, and has been supplied with long-coveted US weapons and generous aid, but many Pakistanis see the United States as a fickle friend.

They remember how the United

States used Pakistan to help push the Soviets out of Afghanistan, and then walked away from the chaos that followed.

Pakistan's military also has bitter memories of the United States stopping arms sales because of Pakistan's nuclear programme, and sanctions imposed after nuclear tests in 1998.

The United States also recently declined to offer energy-hungry Pakistan a nuclear power deal, even as it struck a landmark nuclear cooperation agreement with India.

"Pakistan does not trust the United States as much as China, and the reason for that is India. Pakistan's defence policy is India-centric. Who is going to support Pakistan when it goes up against India? Of course it is going to be China," Niazi said.



PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani worker arranges flowers in front of a welcoming billboard showing pictures of Chinese President Hu Jintao (C) Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf (R) and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz (L) in front of the Parliament House building in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan has fortified security in capital Islamabad and deployed hundreds of extra police and commandos for a four-day state visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao.

2 killed in train station blast in Assam

AFP, Guwahati

Two people were killed and 10 injured yesterday when an explosive device went off in a railway station parking lot in the main city of India's restive northeastern state of Assam, police said.

The blast took place in the early evening when a large crowd had packed the area.

"The blast killed two people and injured 10, of whom three are critical," said Guwahati city police spokesman Rajan Singh, adding that the toll could go up.

Police sealed off the station, where three passenger trains were waiting at the time of the blast.

"The bomb was concealed in a sack and kept on the rickshaw," Singh told AFP.

Bomb attacks are frequent in Assam, where the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) has been fighting for an independent Assamese homeland since 1979.



PHOTO: AFP

Chinese President Hu Jintao (R) greets relatives of revered Indian Doctor Dwarkanath Kotnis in Mumbai yesterday. Hu met the family of an Indian doctor who died while treating Chinese troops during the Sino-Japanese war and has become a symbol of warming ties between Beijing and New Delhi.

Terror attacks spreading in India beyond Kashmir: PM

AFP, New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said yesterday that terrorist attacks in the country had spread beyond Kashmir, which is in the grip of a 17-year-old Islamic separatist insurgency.

"Attempts to take this threat to other parts of the country to create fear in the minds of our people are in evidence," Singh told a gathering of top police and intelligence officials in New Delhi.

Home Minister Shivraj Patil also told the conference Wednesday that terrorist threats to India's infrastructure including its atomic plants had risen in the wake of a planned civilian nuclear energy deal with the United States.

The prime minister said India stood firm in fighting terrorism and "ideologies that justify it".

India has in the past blamed Pakistan-based militants supporting the Indian Kashmir insurgency for deadly attacks, including the July 11 train bombings in financial hub

Mumbai in which 186 people died and more than 800 were injured.

Pakistan has denied the charges.

The prime minister said militants, who have also increasingly targeted mosques and temples in different parts of India, wanted to stoke Hindu-Muslim violence in the country.

"We have found repeatedly that one of the objectives of terrorist groups has been to disrupt communal harmony and foment communal violence," Singh told the conference.

New Delhi blamed Islamic groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir for a series of temple bombings in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi in March, in which more than 20 people were killed.

On Wednesday, the home minister said installations of the oil and natural gas sector, defence, communications and IT sector were also vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

Maoists build camps as Nepalis pray for peace

AFP, Dashrathpur

Nestled in dense jungle and reachable only by canoe, this Maoist rebel camp will soon host United Nations observers monitoring arms as part of Nepal's landmark peace deal.

Dashrathpur is one of seven areas where rebels have pledged to place their arms and soldiers under UN supervision as part of a peace deal reached Tuesday with the multi-party government to end a decade of war.

"Most of our weapons have already been stored, but some we are still using for security purposes," said commander Santosh, the rebel in charge of the camp.

The camp is 585km west of the capital and about 50km north of Nepal's porous border with India. The nearest town, Ramghat Bazaar, has 35,000 people and no government presence such as

police, administrators or the army.

Hundreds of rebels are working to make the site suitable for the 1,700 Maoist soldiers who will eventually be contained there.

Three other camps in the district were also being prepared to receive the same number of soldiers, Santosh said, adding the rebels felt they had won a victory in the war that claimed at least 12,500 lives since 1996 in the impoverished Himalayan nation.

"The signing of the peace deal is a victory for us and it is the start of forming a new Nepal," said the 28-year-old commander as he supervised hundreds of rebels who cleared weeds and dug latrines for the massive rebel camp being prepared on the site of an abandoned government agricultural centre.

The rebels have controlled the area around the camp for at least five years and there have been

fierce clashes here between their forces and the army.

But the clashes have halted since a ceasefire was declared about seven months earlier, after King Gyanendra bowed to mass protests in April and handed back power to political parties.

Khadka Bahadur Rawat, a grocer, said since the rebels and government began observing a ceasefire life had improved immensely in the small town of Ramghat.

"Army patrols have stopped and in the past everyone would be in their homes before six – now people can go out and about," said Rawat.

The rebels, who draw inspiration from the people's war tactics of Mao Zedong, are accused of abduction, extortion and murder in their bid to abolish the monarchy and establish a communist republic.

Fresh fighting erupts in eastern Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

Heavy fighting gripped Sri Lanka yesterday as Tamil Tiger rebels and troops blamed each other for the renewed battles and India sent a top envoy to discuss the worsening violence.

Sri Lanka's defence ministry said war planes pounded bases of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the north-

eastern district of Mullaitivu where the rebels have their main military installations.

"Air strikes were launched following confirmation by air force unmanned aerial vehicles that these were Sea Tiger bases," the ministry said in a statement.

It said the Tiger bases had the capacity to launch attacks on naval patrols in the area.