

Lanka revives tough anti-terror laws targeting Tigers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government invoked tough anti-terror laws yesterday targeting Tamil Tiger rebels but stopped short of banning them to deal with spiralling violence, a top official source said.

Colombo kept the door open for talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by rejecting calls from hardline nationalist allies to outlaw the rebels after a suicide bomber tried to kill the defence secretary last Friday.

The cabinet agreed to reactivate some provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the Public Security Ordinance to give sweeping powers to security forces to detain suspects, a top official told AFP.

But it held back from banning the rebels to leave room for Norwegian peacebrokers to try and revive a faltering peace initiative and 2002 ceasefire that lies in tatters, a diplomatic source said.

"This shows that they (the government) are trying to act tough without ending the peace process," the diplomat close to the process said.

The Tamil Tigers are outlawed in several countries, including across the 25-member European Union, the United States and in neighbouring India. A Sri Lankan ban on the rebels was lifted in 2002 ahead of reviving peace talks.

The anti-terror laws had also effectively been suspended following the 2002 Norwegian-brokered truce with the LTTE.

The LTTE has been fighting for independence for the island's minority 2.5 million Tamil community in the majority Sinhalese nation of 19.5 million people.

The government source said the cabinet was keen to ensure that bringing back PTA provisions did not affect the ceasefire agreement amid fears that the restoration of the draconian laws would mean the end of the truce.



A soldier shows the media the gates as the army closes down Fiji's parliament yesterday to tighten its control over the country after Tuesday's bloodless coup.

Fiji coup leader tightens grip

AFP, Suva

Fiji's new military ruler yesterday declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament and warned he would crush any attempt at revolt, a day after leading a bloodless coup that sparked global outrage.

Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama tightened his grip on power by swearing in his caretaker prime minister, sacking two top law and order officials and briefly rounding up vocal critics of his takeover.

As ousted prime minister Laisenia Qarase, along with New Zealand and Australia, urged Fijians to resist the nation's fourth coup in two decades using peaceful means, Bainimarama made it clear he would brook no such opposition.

"After receiving intelligence reports, there are a number of individuals who are planning disruption to peace and harmony, (and) we have reasonable grounds to believe the life of the state is threatened," he said at a press conference.

"If we are pushed to use force, let

me state we will do so very quickly," he warned.

Suva was calm under a tight military presence as Bainimarama pursued his long-threatened "clean-up" of alleged corruption, but many residents headed to work after he urged them to continue life as normal.

The state of emergency authorised the military to throw a tight security cordon around Suva and ordered reservists to report for duty. The military also reserved "the right to enforce curfews if need warrants".

Around 40 troops forced the senate to adjourn, drove out members and took over the parliamentary complex.

Troops also briefly detained Fiji's acting Police Commissioner Moses Driver and his deputy -- who surrendered after soldiers threatened to storm a police complex unless they came out -- and four senior civil servants.

Musharraf says he won't give up army job ahead of polls

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf said in an interview broadcast yesterday that he will not give up his position as the chief of the army before polls next year.

Musharraf, who came to power in a coup in 1999, said he would continue to hold the job as the army chief as long as the constitution allowed him to.

"The constitution allows me to hold it till 2007, so I will hold it... So if the elections, as I said are in November, I will be in uniform," Musharraf told private Indian NDTV network in an interview.

Musharraf said it was not easy to give up the army uniform.

"It's not easy, because there are some perceptions. At this moment what Pakistan is facing needs a unity, a unity of command over important organs of state. That includes the military, the political and the bureaucracy."

The president, however, did not give a definite date for the polls, saying they could be held late 2007 or early 2008.

Former Indian minister gets life for murder

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

A court here awarded life imprisonment to former Federal Minister and leading tribal leader Shibu Soren convicted for the murder of his private secretary.

Public Prosecutor AK Singh had pressed for death sentence for 65-year-old Soren and four others, who were also convicted for the murder of Shashi Nath Jha 12 years ago, but Additional Sessions Judge B R Kedia, who announced the quantum of sentence on Tuesday evening, rejected the plea saying that "it is not the rarest of rare cases" which merits the maximum punishment.

Soren, chief of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha who resigned as Coal Minister soon after his conviction, a political party of the tribal state of Jharkhand and a constituent of India's ruling United Progressive Alliance, became the first cabinet minister of India on November 28 when the court had convicted him of the murder in 1994.

US not winning in Iraq, Gates says

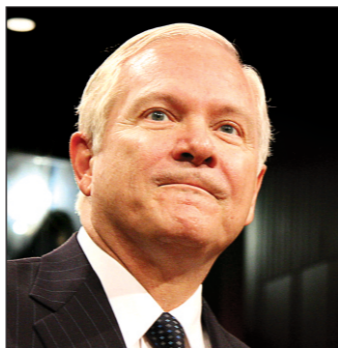
AFP, Washington

Defense Secretary designate Robert Gates said Tuesday the United States is not winning the war in Iraq and warned of the risk of a "regional conflagration" unless the situation improves.

A wave of bipartisan support carried Gates through his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, which voted unanimously to endorse him after hours of testimony.

The full Senate was debating his nomination yesterday. If confirmed, as expected, Gates will replace Donald Rumsfeld as defense secretary at the lowest point in the United States's most divisive and difficult war since Vietnam.

"Our course over the next year or two will determine whether the American and Iraqi people and the next president of the United States



will face a slowly but steadily improving situation in Iraq and in the region or will face the very real risk and possible reality of a regional conflagration," Gates said.

"We need to work together to develop a strategy that does not leave Iraq in chaos and that protects our long-term interests in and hopes for the region," he said.

Gates rejected military action against Iran or Syria except as "an absolute last resort" and urged open channels of communications despite the negative role they have played in Iraq.

Senators from both sides of the aisles praised Gates for his candor with Democrats calling it a welcome change from the combative Rumsfeld.

Gates said he would take seriously the advice of US military leaders, who often were overshadowed or even publicly spurned by Rumsfeld, and to be forthright in making his own recommendations on Iraq.

A former director of the CIA and adviser to six presidents, Gates said he was not giving up a job he loved as president of Texas A and M University to be "a bump on the log and not say exactly what I think."