INTERNATIONAL



Indian delegation head Rear Admiral BR Rao (2L) holds talks with Pakistani Major General Jamil-ur-Rahman (R) at the Defence Ministry in Rawalpindi yesterday. Pakistani and Indian defence officials started a two-day meeting on Friday in a bid to settle a row over maritime boundaries in the Sir Creek marshlands that lie between the countries

Tigers warn Colombo

Renewed conflict in Sri Lanka will escalate into full-scale war if the military follows through on a declared plan to evict the Tamil Tigers from the island's volatile east, a top rebel has warned.

Around 20,000 war-displaced Tamils have fled from camps in and

Nordic truce monitors are

"Such actions by the Sri Lankan

political wing, told Reuters in an e-

of war by the Sri Lankan government. Such war-mongering by the Sri Lankan government will take the island to a very destructive and disastrous war."

The military has hemmed the Tigers into a 22-km stretch of coastline around Vakarai, and has already driven the rebels out of territory near the strategic northeastern port of Trincomalee further

Tigers' only remaining direct sea access in the east, and losing it would leave them landlocked in large swathes of jungle inland and surrounded by government territory and army camps

Officials say the government aims to clear the Tigers from the whole of the east and hold local elections that a faction of renegade rebels opposed to the Tigers and

Thousands of ordinary civilians displaced yet again by renewed fighting, many of whom were still striving to rebuild their lives after the 2004 tsunami, are now living in rudimentary camps set up in schools, fields and even temples in government territory.

Tigers of threatening to kill them if they left besieged rebel territory and effectively using them as human shelling for driving them out of their homes and killing their relatives and neighbours."People who have lost all their possessions in the tsunami are being forced out of their land and are being subjected to untold miseries. This is nothing less than ethnic hamilselvan said.

vulnerable to bomb attack AFP, Washington

Hudson River are more vulnerable to a bomb attack than previously thought, the New York Times reported yesterday, citing an analysis done for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

explosives could cause significant flooding of the rail system within hours, the Times reports, citing the document.

The newspaper received a draft summary of the most recent analysis from a government official who -according to the Times -- was concerned over the Port Authority's failure to respond to the information after receiving it three weeks ago.

The analysis shows it would take a mere six minutes for any of the four Port Authority train tunnels to flood if a bomb -- which the newspaper described as "significant but not necessarily very large" -- were

While the text cites aid to the Palestinian Authority, it is targeted at Hamas, which won control of the authority in March 2006 following elections.

It allows aid to continue to activities of Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas, whose Fatah group has been in street battles with Hamas activists for the past two weeks.

Washington wants to push Hamas into accepting Israel's right to exist as a basis for the "roadmap" plan for peace between the two sides

continued concern over the failure of the current government to renounce violence and terror recognise Israel, and respect its previous agreements and obligations," said a senior administration

However, the official said current assistance programmes to the Palestinian people will not be affected by the law.

Meanwhile, a fierce gunbattle broke out between Hamas and Fatah militants in Gaza City early yesterday, underscoring the fragility of a two-day old truce that had largely ended factional violence

The street battle erupted when Hamas militiamen tried to free two

kidnapped militants, including a senior member of the Islamic group. It died down after 20 minutes as Muslim clerics and other mediators worked to restore the cease-fire Nobody was hurt despite the battle's ntensity, health officials said.

Meanwhile, Palestinians stepped up rocket attacks on Israel, including one that veered off course and hit a Gaza home, injuring a 2-year-old Palestinian boy sleeping in his bedroom, officials aid.

Six other rockets landed in Israel but nobody was hurt. The barrage threatened a separate cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians that ended months of Israeli military activity in the Gaza strip.

of full-scale war

REUTERS, Colombo

around the eastern Tiger-held town of Vakarai since early November to escape deadly artillery battles that have killed dozens of civilians, some trekking for days through jungle and even swimming across rivers.

alarmed at the military's plan to flush the Tigers out of the area, saying it violates the terms of a now tattered 2002 ceasefire, and the international community has appealed in vain to both sides to halt the killing.

military will be considered by the LTTE as full scale war," SP Thamilselvan, head of the Tigers'

"It will certainly be a declaration

The area around Vakarai is the

seen aligned to the military are expected to win, before heavily developing infrastructure there.

Some escapees accuse the shields, while others blame army genocide by the Šri Lankan state,

Indo-Pak officials hold border talks

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan and India are to hold talks vesterday aimed at resolving a dispute over an estuary on their border that has hampered exploration for oil and gas and led to the detention of hundreds of their fisher-

The talks on the Sir Creek estuary, that flows into the Arabian sea between the Pakistani province of Sindh and Gujarat, are part of a tentative peace process the nuclear-armed neighbours launched in early 2004.

The two countries agreed in May to carry out a joint survey of the 100km long estuary. Their military officials will discuss modalities for conducting the survey in talks on Friday and Saturday in Rawalpindi.

"The delegations of the two countries will deliberate and work out a mechanism for undertaking a joint survey in Sir Creek," the Pakistani Ministry of Defence said in

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, who has called for compromise over the core dispute with India over Kashmir, said this month the Sir Creek dispute "can be resolved expeditiously with courage".

the Palestinian government but

Act of 2006," Bush said in a state-

ment, is "designed to promote the

development of democratic institu-

tions in areas under the administra-

tive control of the Palestinian

the United States to avoid any

organisations Washington has

labeled terrorist until they recognise

Israel's right to exist, renounce

contact with Hamas and other

The law declares it the policy of

The "Palestinian Anti-Terrorism

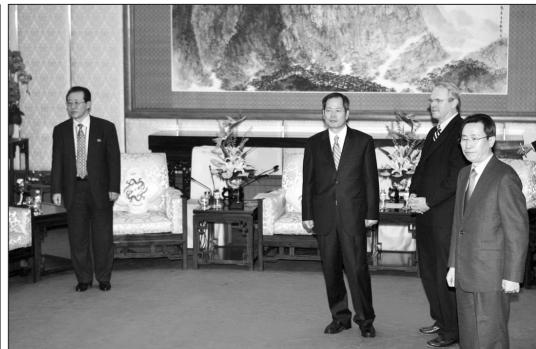
refuses to recognise Israel.

Analysts say demarcation of the estuary should not be difficult to agree but decades of mistrust have hampered a settlement.

India says the boundary should lie in the middle of the estuary, basing its claim on accepted practice as well as pillars built down the middle of the channel during British

Pakistan says the border should lie on the southeastern bank of the creek, basing its claim on a line shown on a map drawn by the British governor of Bombay in the early 20th century.

Experts say the two countries could reach a compromise through a new survey. The water flow has changed over the decades, necessitating the



North Korea negotiator Kim Kye Gwan (L) waits as South Korean chief negotiator Chun Yung-woo (C), US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill (2nd R), and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei gather for a meeting with Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, after the close of five days of six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programme in Beijing yesterday.

for arms monitoring

REUTERS, Kathmandu

The Nepali government and Maoist rebels will employ retired Gurkha soldiers to begin verifying arms until a full United Nations monitoring mission arrives, both sides have

The two sides signed a landmark peace deal last month declaring an end to a decade-old conflict in which more than 13,000 people were killed and thousands displaced

The deal envisages the Maoists ioining an interim government after storing their weapons under UN locks ahead of next year's elections for a constituent assembly to map Nepal's political future and decide the fate of the monarchy, which the Maoists want abolished.

The UN says some monitors could arrive this month but a full mission will take some time. Nepali officials say it could take two months to put in place a complete interna-

"We have reached an understanding to use 111 (Gurkha) sol-

diers who have retired from the Indian and British armies in the past three years to assist the UN to begin arms monitoring," Krishna Prasac Situala, government negotiator and Home (interior) Minister, told reporters after a meeting with Maoists late on Thursdav

Thousands of Gurkha soldiers, a fighting tribe from Nepal's Himalayan foothills known for their fierce combat abilities, serve the Indian army under an agreement between the two countries.

Gurkhas have also been serving in the British army for nearly 200

Chief rebel negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara said the recruitment of the Gurkhas would begin soon and the verification of weapons could start within 10 days.

Maoists say slow management of arms would delay the planned elections for the assembly - their long running demand to end the anti-monarchy insurgency.

Nepal to use Gurkhas US wrecked hopes of N Korean nuke deal

Says S Korean leader

AFP, Beijing

South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun has accused the United States of wrecking last year's agreement to scrap North Korea's nuclear programmes by simultaneously imposing financial sanctions.

Roh, in strongly-worded comments reported in Friday's media, also suggested the US Treasury and State Departments are split in their approach to the sanctions. which were a key sticking point in this week's nuclear negotiations.

"If you look at it in a bad light, you may say (the two US departments) were playing a prearranged game, he said, according to an officia transcript of his speech delivered

Roh noted that the US blacklisting of Macau's Banco Delta Asia (BDA) -- a move which led to the

Korean accounts -- came just a few September 19, 2005

Six-nation nuclear negotiations which began in 2003 achieved an apparent breakthrough on that date when the North agreed in principle to scrap its nuclear programmes in return for economic and energy aid and security quarantees.

But North Korea boycotted the forum two months later in protest at the curbs on the BDA accounts, which sparked similar action elsewhere in Asia and effectively shut it out of much of the international banking system.

When talks resumed in Beijing this week the communist state nsisted that the issue be resolved before any further negotiations on denuclearisation. The talks ended Friday without apparent agreement

freezing of 24 million dollars in North and without setting a firm date to

efforts to achieve the September 19 joint statement," Roh told the National Unification Advisory

"Then the BDA issue came up and this is incomprehensible to me. As the statement was being signed in China, the US Treasury Department already froze the BDA accounts a few days earlier. Looking back, I don't know whether the State Department knew about it or not."

Roh guestioned whether the departments differed in their approach, "with the State Department in support of flexibility while the Treasury Department sticks to the principle. We will never

Jordan warns window for peace fading in ME

Malaysian flood victims are evacuated on board a rescue boat in southern Johor state Thursday. Floods in Malaysia

have killed at least six people, officials said yesterday as continuing heavy rains spread the deluge to six states and

AFP. Tokvo

Jordan's King Abdullah II warned vesterday chances were running out for peace in the Middle East. with "disastrous" consequences in store unless progress is made in the first half of the new year.

forced nearly 80,000 people to abandon their homes.

Speaking on a visit to Japan, a key donor to the region, Abdullah made an impassioned call for the world to restore hope for Palestinians amid chaos in the Palestinian territories and elsewhere in the region.

"I believe that the window of opportunity is diminishing and it won't be long before we can say that the futures of the Palestinians are gone," he told the Japan Institute of International Affairs.

"2007 is a very critical year, and if we don't create a process to move forward in the next six or seven months, then I don't think we ever will. And the outcome of that will be disastrous for all of us, Israel included.

He said the international community needed to prove to both the Palestinian and Israeli people that a two-state solution of an independent Israel and Palestine was

"If we don't move forward, I fear

we will find ourselves in a situation where we will never have a twostate solution." he said. 'Therefore we will never have

peace between Israelis and Palestinians, therefore we will never have peace between Israelis and Arabs, and therefore we will condemn our region for another decade or two of violence, which none of us can afford."

Abdullah, who held talks Friday with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is seen as a key Western ally in the Middle East, with his kingdom straddling Israel, the Palestinian territories and Iraq.

He visited Japan amid turmoil in the region, with clashes in the Palestinian territories between rival factions, pressure on the Western-backed government in Lebanon and daily carnage in Iraq.

Abdullah said he told US President George W. Bush, who visited Jordan last month for talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, that the world needed to look at the three Middle Eastern crises all at once.

"We have to know how to walk and chew gum at the same time," he said. "We cannot focus on just one issue.

Abdullah said he supported

Japan's bid for greater involvement in the region. Japan, the world's second largest economy, relies almost entirely on Arab countries and Iran for its oil.

"You can't afford instability in our part of the world," Abdullah

"You are in a very unique position as a strong member of the international community because you have not involved in politics. Therefore you are considered an honest broker and that is increasingly important," he said.

On a visit to the region in July, Japan's then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi proposed building a "peace and prosperity corridor" in the West Bank Under the initiative, Japan

would work with Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians to develop the West Bank's broken economy, including designing an agroindustrial park.

Abdullah said he supported the initiative but that it was no substitute for a political solution. "The people living on the

ground won't buy in into any economic formula or initiative unless they are guaranteed that the political process is moving forward." he

Afghan attack targets anti-Taliban MP Roadside bomb kills 5 policemen

An outspoken anti-Taliban legislator survived a suicide car bomb attack close to his house in Afghanistan's capital yesterday that injured five civilians and three of his bodyguards, police said

The blast was the first suicide attack in heavily guarded Kabul since October, and comes near the end of Afghanistan's bloodiest year since the ultra-Islamic Taliban were ousted from power in 2001. An explosives-laden vehicle

detonated near a car belonging to MP Padshah Khan Zadran, about 50 metres (yards) away from his residence in eastern Kabul, police criminal investigation chief Ali Shah Paktiawal told AFP.

"The suicide attacker rammed his bomb-filled vehicle into Zadran's car as his car left the house but fortunately he was not in the vehicle," Paktiawal said. "Three of his bodyguards in his

civilian passers-by," he said. Blood and parts of the attacker's body were strewn across the road, and the MP's car was badly damaged, an AFP photographer at the scene of the blast said. Zadran, the leader of an ethnic

Pashtun tribe and a former anti-

car were wounded, along with five

Soviet fighter, is an MP for southeastern Paktia province. He has often criticised the Taliban and accused neighbouring Pakistan of aiding them. The bodyguards and civilians, who include some of his relatives

were in a critical condition, police They said that in mid-December they had arrested an Afghan national named Rasoul Khan Sartak on charges of planning to assassinate Zadram. The suspect is in

currently in police custody. "Rasoul Khan Sartak has confessed he was sent on a mission to assassinate Padshah Khan Zardarn and we have convincing documents. He is in our custody now," said Paktiawal.

Earlier five Afghan policemen were killed Friday when a roadside bomb blast ripped through their vehicle in southern Afghanistan, The police were on patrol some

10km from Tirinkot, the capital of Turiasaurus riodevensis, troubled Uruzgan province, when named for the region and village in the remote-controlled device Spain where it was found, lived exploded, said provincial spokesabout 145 million years ago and man Abdul Qayoom Qayoomi. was a sauropod, that familiar kind "Five police were martyred in the of dinosaur with a long neck, long blast near Tirinkot," he said. tail and massive body that walked



Handout shows an artists rendering of a giant Sauropod, remains of which have been found in Tereut, Spain. Massive fossilised bones uncovered in Spain show that Europe could rival the Americas and Africa as home to ground-shaking monster dinosaurs, scientists report.

Fossil of huge plant-eating dinosaur found in Spain

REUTERS, Washington

Scientists in Spain have found the fossilised remains of one of the largest animals ever to walk the Earth, a gargantuan plant-eating dinosaurup to 125 feet long and weighing as much as

It is the largest dinosaur ever found in Europe. Previous dinosaurs of this scale have been found mostly in the Americas and Africa.

Other well-known sauropods include Apatosaurus (formerly known as Brontosaurus), Brachiosaurus and Diplodocus. This one is emblematic of a previously unrecognized branch of European sauropod evolution, the scientists said. Sauropods are the largest land animals in Earth's history.

Fog paralyses London's Heathrow airport again

REUTERS, London Thousands of travellers struggling to

another day of chaos and frustration on Friday as London's Heathrow airport was blanketed in fog. "The weather across much of the UK is regrettably showing little sign

of improvement," said Geoff Want,

director of ground operations for

get home for Christmas faced

British Airways, which has cancelled all domestic flights Boeing 747 Jumbo jets are being put on some European routes to try

nd deal with the backlog. On Thursday, 350 flights were cancelled and a similar number will be stopped on Friday, said a spokesman for airport operator BAA, which runs Heathrow and six other airports in Britain.

"It is the world's busiest international airport but we have only two runways. If you compare with our main competitors in Europe, Frankfurt has three, Paris has four and Amsterdam has five. We have fundamental capacity constraints, BAA spokesman Simon Baugh told BBC radio on Friday.

British Airways had to despatch more than 3,000 passengers on coaches across Britain as the airport was gripped by fog for a third