

Tigers seek support, sympathy from UK Lanka asks US to enlist LTTE as terrorist group

COLOMBO, May 5: The Sri Lankan government has requested the United States to include the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the list of terrorist organisations identified by the US and to ban its operations, justice sector sources here said today, reports Xinhua.

The sources said that during his recent visit to the US, Sri Lankan Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, GL Peris had presented to the US authorities evidence relating to the LTTE's terrorist acts in the country.

He also requested the US authorities to stop avenues of funding to the LTTE as this could help the government draw the LTTE into talks, the sources stated.

They added that a high-powered delegation from the US will arrive here to discuss this problem.

The LTTE has been fighting a 14-year guerrilla war against the government for a separate state in the north and east of Sri Lanka since 1983.

AP adds: Tamil Tiger rebels have requested support and sympathy from Britain's new prime minister in their bid to win legitimate political rights for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka.

In a letter congratulating Tony Blair on his massive victory in the British election, rebel chief Velupillai Prabhakaran said he was confident Britain will play a constructive role in creating a harmonious world order by lessening poverty, racial oppression and social injustice.

Britain recently helped broker an agreement between Sri Lanka's main parties to coordinate policy making toward the Tamil minority, but it has squashed allegations of links with Tamil rebels.

The accord announced on April 3 ended years of bickering between the two sides representing the majority Sinhalese, often seen as the first hurdle toward negotiating peace with militants from the Tamils.

Face-to-face talks with Sharif will lead to warm ties: Gujral

NEW DELHI, May 5: Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said he hopes a face-to-face meeting with his Pakistani counterpart next week will lead to warmer relations between the longtime enemies, reports Reuter.

"We will try to find a way out of the deadlock in Indo-Pakistan relations and I hope we will find a way to improve relations to our mutual benefit," United News of India (UNI) quoted Gujral as saying late on Sunday.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted India's new prime minister as telling dignitaries in the northern state of Punjab that he expected a positive result from the meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of May 12.

Gujral and Sharif are to hold talks ahead of a three-day summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in the capital of the Maldives, Male.

The meeting would follow two rounds of high-level talks which resumed in March after three years of bitterness between the South Asian neighbours.

It would be the first meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries since April 1993, when Nawaz Sharif and Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao met on the sidelines of a SAARC conference.

Gujral told the audience in Punjab that as foreign minister under former prime minister H D Deve Gowda, he had instructed Indian officials to refrain from making critical statements towards Pakistan.

Last month before being named prime minister, Gujral held upbeat talks in New Delhi with Pakistani Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan. As a goodwill gesture, they agreed to free several hundred fishermen detained for illegally fishing in each other's waters.

During his one-day visit to Punjab, Gujral said India wanted Pakistan to thrive and was willing to increase trade.

"Let Pakistan be prosperous as a prosperous Pakistan will be to India's benefit," UNI quoted him as saying.

Gujral said in a bid to build mutual trust he had allowed the export of 14,000 tonnes of Indian sugar to Pakistan by rail.

Some leaders in Punjab state, which borders on Pakistan, have called for the opening up of the border to permit free trade between the two neighbours, which have fought three wars since 1947.

Gujral said India exports some 20 million rupees (560 million dollar) worth of goods every year to Pakistan via Dubai and Hong Kong, and New Delhi would continue to press the SAARC to convert South Asia into a free trade zone.



Russian monarchists march in Red Square holding icons and banners with the last Russian Tsar Nikolai II's portrait on one of them Sunday. They staged the march and prayed for reconstruction of the monument to the last Russian Emperor which was demolished a month ago by a bomb blast. — AFP/UNB photo

Govt abandoned Agni project: Cong MP

Earlier AFP says, a prominent member of parliament yesterday claimed the Indian government has abandoned a project to build a long-range missile which has been tested successfully several times since 1991.

B B Dutta of the Congress (I) party said he had "definite information" that the ambitious project to build the ballistic missile called "Agni" (fire) has been shelved.

"The government should come out openly and categorically speak on its present status," said Dutta, a member of parliament's upper house.

"Despite assurances given by three prime ministers, no field-test of the Agni has been conducted," he said, adding Indian scientists and defence research facilities had the capability to mass-produce the missile system.

The United States has voiced fears that the Agni could trigger off an arms race in Asia.

Pakistan has also expressed concern about the Agni and has urged India to freeze the missile projects, saying the step would reduce tensions between the two South Asian rivals who have fought three wars since 1947.

BRIEFLY

8 die as house collapses in Pakistan: Eight members of an Afghan refugee family were buried alive when their mud house collapsed near Peshawar overnight, police said Sunday. AFP reports from Peshawar.

Abdul Mannan and his wife and seven children were asleep in an old house in suburban Tahkal Bala district when the wooden beam of its roof caved in. Police said Mannan survived with injuries but the rest of his family was buried under the debris.

Seselj to run for Serbian presidency: The ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party announced Sunday that its leader, Vojislav Seselj, would run for president in elections expected later this year, the Fonet news agency reported Sunday. AP reports from Belgrade.

Seselj, who once organised Serb paramilitary groups that fought against Croats and Muslims in the former Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Bosnia, did well in recent polls conducted by local marketing agencies. Some rated him higher than the current president, Slobodan Milosevic, who controls the dominant state television network. The two once allied, when Milosevic was instigating rebellions of ethnic Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia. When Milosevic turned peacemaker, Seselj called him a traitor. Despite that, both men are outspoken in their rejection of the democratic-leaning opposition parties.

5 suspected Tajik gunmen killed: Five gunmen suspected of trying to assassinate Tajikistan's president last week were killed Sunday in a raid on their hideout by government forces, Russian news agencies said. AP reports from Dushanbe.

The armed group's leader, Khurshed Abdushukurov — who called himself "Tyson" — committed suicide during the military operation and four others were killed, a government spokesman told ITAR-Tass and Interfax.

King Carlos arrives in Russia: Spain's King Juan Carlos arrives Monday for a meeting with President Boris Yeltsin and three days of talks on expanding economic ties between the two countries. AP reports from Moscow.

In Madrid, Spain's Foreign Minister Abel Matutes said economic relations between the two countries lag behind "the wonderful relations maintained by Spain and Russia in the political sphere," the Russian ITAR-Tass news agency reported. One of the main goals of Juan Carlos, visit is to "expand trade, economic and financial cooperation," including a possible signing of an agreement on investment and a treaty on transport cooperation, Matutes was quoted as saying.

Indonesia expels HR activist: A Malaysian human rights activist said Monday he was expelled from Indonesia when he arrived to attend a conference on the status of the Palestinian territories. AP reports from Kuala Lumpur.

Syed Husin Ali, a legislator and president of the opposition People's Party, said Indonesian officials took him from his Jakarta hotel Sunday and put him on a flight to Malaysia.

4 ROK criminals jailed in Australia: Four South Korean criminals entered Australia tourists escaping judicial and immigration scrutiny even after they were tried and convicted of robbing homes in Sydney, officials admitted Monday. AP reports from Sydney.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper said Sydney police knew of the four men's criminal past, but it was never disclosed during their trial last month for a one-day robbery spree on January 21. They were jailed for 18 months for the burglaries, and will be deported at the end of the term.

Ex-Colombian Speaker found dead: A congressman kidnapped by leftist rebels in June 1995 was found dead Sunday along with three guerrillas, apparently drowned after their boat capsized during a river journey, authorities said. AP reports from Bogota.

The body of Rodrigo Turbay Cote, former speaker of the House of Representatives, was found on a bank of the Caguan river in Casuta state some 360 kilometres (220 miles) south of Bogota, police said. A rebel communique received by an area radio station informed authorities that a boat carrying Turbay had capsized on the river on Saturday night.

Strong quake hits Japan: A strong earthquake shook northern Japan Monday but there were no immediate reports of injuries or damage. AP reports from Tokyo.

The magnitude 4.9 quake struck at 10:48 am (0148 GMT) and was centered off the western coast of Aomori Prefecture, about 10 kilometres (6 miles) below the seabed, the Central Meteorological Agency said.



Miss Paraguay, Rosanna Gimenez (L), Miss Bulgaria, Krassimira Todorova (C), and Miss Australia, Laura Csorton (R) rehearse the opening dance number Sunday for the Miss Universe pageant scheduled for May 16 in Miami Beach, FL. Contestants are competing for cash and prizes worth over 100,000 USD. — AFP/UNB photo

New Labour govt starts repairing ties with EU

LONDON, May 5: The new Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair opens its first full week in power today by starting to repair Britain's relations with the European Union and deciding what to do about the country's strained finances, reports Reuter.

Minister for Europe Doug Henderson will go to Brussels to take the first step towards signing the EU's Social Charter, set up to regulate working conditions in the 15-nation bloc.

Former prime minister John Major refused to sign up to the charter, saying it could cost 500,000 jobs, but Labour pledged to join as soon as it won power.

Taiwanese students protest govt's failure to check violent crimes

TAIPEI, May 5: About 40 Taiwan college students marched in front of the island's cabinet building in Taipei today to protest against the government's failure to check violent crime, reports Reuter.

The students, outraged by the murder of a famous actress's daughter, demanded the resignation of Premier Lien Chan and a reshuffle of the cabinet.

"We want the cabinet of Lien Chan to step down to take responsibility for the fear that has been inflicted on the people, especially women," student leader Wenchun-Ya said in a statement read in front of the cabinet building.

US-North Korean talks on MIAs break new ground

NEW YORK, May 5: US North Korean talks about American servicemen missing since the Korean War have broken new ground, with the two sides discussing reports that some Americans still live in North Korea, a Defence Department spokesman said, reports AP.

The talks, which already have led to the return of one US servicemen's remains, also include discussion about access for US researchers to North Korean military archives, said the spokesman, Larry Greer of the Pentagon's POW-MIA office.

"The only things we talked about prior to this were joint excavations of suspected POW (prisoner of war) burial sites," Greer said, "and that's only one of the three areas we're talking about now. Both sides are very interested in establishing a level of trust with the other."

Army warns against illegal street parade in Jakarta

JAKARTA, May 5: Jakarta's military chief has warned of firm action against political party supporters if they continue to hold illegal street parades during Indonesia's election campaign, Media Indonesia Newspaper reported today, reports Reuter.

The ultimatum came as the Muslim-orientated United Development Party (PPP), whose party-faithful have frequently violated the ruling against street parades, prepared to resume campaigning across the capital this afternoon.

The PPP cancelled campaigning on Friday after police placed restrictions on its planned gatherings.

"If they continue to commit violations, then we with great regret will have to take firm action," Jakarta Military Commander Major-General Sutiyoso was quoted as saying on Sunday by the privately run Media Indonesia Newspaper.

Sutiyoso said the military were in a difficult and uncomfortable position because if they allowed the street parades to continue they would cause traffic jams and disturb public order.

The three legal parties, the PPP, the ruling Golkar and the Christian-nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), are vying for the backing of nearly 125 million voters to fill 425 elected seats in the 500-seat house of representatives. The other 75 seats are allotted to the military, which does not vote.

Ex-PM of Lanka Dahanayake dead

COLOMBO, May 5: Former prime minister Wijayanada Dahanayake, the most senior politician in Sri Lanka, died in his home town Galle in the south on Sunday at the age of 95, according to official sources today, reports Xinhua.

His funeral will take place on Wednesday.

He began to enter the country's first parliament in 1947.

He was appointed prime minister in September 1959 after prime minister Bandaranaike was assassinated.

In March 1960, he sacked the cabinet overnight and called for elections which he contested under a new party — the Peoples Democratic Party formed by him.

After he was defeated in the election, he joined the United National Party in 1960 and was appointed minister of home affairs, rural development and small industries.

KNU rebels rob ferry passengers, hold 11 hostages for ransom: SLORC

YANGON, May 5: Armed guerrillas of the rebel Karen National Union (KNU) stopped a ferry boat in southern Myanmar, robbed its passengers and are holding all 11 of them for ransom, the Myanmar military government said today, reports Reuter.

The boat with 10 passengers and its owner were on its way between Myeik and Taninthayee last Thursday when the rebels attacked. They demanded a ransom to release their hostages, a statement from the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) said.

The statement gave no details on the fate of the hostages or the incident, which was said to have taken place in the Taninthayee district about 880 km (550 miles) south of Yangon.

But officers of the KNU, which is fighting the SLORC for greater autonomy for the eastern Burmese Karen State, denied they were involved.

PNG soldiers on alert at army HQs

PORT MORESBY, May 5: Fully-armed soldiers were on alert at Papua New Guinea's main army headquarters Murray Barracks today following reports police have been ordered to arrest sacked army boss Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok, reports Reuter.

Singirok who led an army revolt in March which forced Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan to step aside, lives inside Murray Barracks and is still de facto commander of the army.

Defence Force Chief of Staff Colonel Reg Renagi told Reuters the army was on alert and would not allow any police to enter the barracks to arrest Singirok he said it was illegal for police to enter the barracks without army authorisation.

Syria committed to resume talks with Israel

Arafat, Mubarak discuss Middle East peace

CAIRO, May 5: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak today discussed Middle East peace talks, which have been suspended over Israel's construction of Jewish settlements on occupied land, reports Reuter.

Arafat consults Mubarak often on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, broken off after Israel started a Jewish settlement on a site in Arab east Jerusalem called Har Homa in Hebrew and Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arabic.

The judaisation of quds (Jerusalem) is a dangerous crime as well as continued action to confiscate land and build settlements, especially Jabal Abu Ghneim," Arafat told reporters late on Sunday.

This is the basic issue between us and them, in addition to lack of accurate and honest implementation of what has been agreed upon, whether it be the first, second or third peace agreements signed in Washington or Cairo."

Israel regards east Jerusalem — captured in 1967 — as part of its indivisible capital, Palestinian view it as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

EU Envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos was also in Cairo and Arafat is to meet Israeli President Ezer Weizman on Tuesday.

Asked if he thought US envoy Dennis Ross, due in Israel on Tuesday in an effort to restart the talks, had new ideas to break the stalemate, Arafat said: "I don't think so." But he added: "All of our options are open."

AP adds, Syrian President Hafez Assad is committed to resuming peace talks with Israel, the European Union's envoy to the Middle East said Sunday.

Miguel Moratinos met with Assad for three hours Saturday in Damascus, then traveled to Israel and met Sunday with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy.

The former Spanish ambassador to Israel dismissed Israeli press reports

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Off the Record

Diseases of the rich

GENEVA: The number of deaths from cancer, heart attack, stroke and other chronic illnesses — now at 24 million per year — will increase as "diseases of the rich spread around the world, a UN report says, says AP.

Thanks to medical progress, more people are living longer than ever, with life expectancy in developing countries averaging 64 years and reaching 80 years in some industrialised nations, the World Health Organisation says.

But millions of people throw away the chance for a happy, healthy old age by not exercising and eating right.

"Longer life can be a penalty as well as a prize. A large part of the price to be paid is in the currency of chronic disease," WHO says in its World Health Report 1997.

Trying to improve the health of the elderly is or crucial economic importance, it says. In the next 25 years, the population over 65 is likely to grow by 82 per cent, compared to a 46 per cent increase in the working-age population and only 3 per cent in newborns.

The 160-page study, released for WHO's annual assembly, warns of a "double burden" of risks.

Air travel has spread the risk of infectious diseases once confined to the Third World, it says.

Still struggling with ailments linked to poverty, developing countries are paying the price for mimicking Western lifestyles with an upsurge in diseases of the affluent.

Heart disease and stroke, which killed 15.3 million people last year and are the leading causes of death in many industrialised nations, are on the increase in poorer countries.

Netanyahu, Sara regular moviegoers!

TEL AVIV: How many Israelis does it take to watch a movie?, reports AP.

Sixty, if one of them is Prime Ministers Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Yediot Achronot newspaper reported Sunday that the prime minister's office bought 60 tickets to a Tel Aviv theater so that Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, could see "Breaking The Waves" in safety on Saturday night.

The couple, surrounded by a battery of bodyguards, dressed in jeans to resemble regular moviegoers. Undercover security people also took over the running of the theater, posing as ushers and leading regular customers to their seats.

The tickets — which reportedly cost Israeli taxpayers 1,380 shekels (410 dils) — reflected the tight security around Israeli leaders since the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.

The prime minister's office refused to confirm or deny the report.

Iran to declare names for May 23 presidential polls Thursday

DUBAI, May 5: Iran will announce the names of approved presidential candidates on Thursday, allowing 12 days to campaign for May 23 polls to replace President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the official news agency IRNA said today, reports Reuter.

It said the candidates were being chosen by the Guardian Council out of 238 who had signed up to run in the elections.

"Candidates will have 12 days for presidential campaigning starting on Saturday May 10, the agency added.

The Guardian Council, a powerful body of lawyers and Muslim clerics, approved only four out of 128 who signed up to run in the 1993 poll. Candidates are screened for their allegiance to Iran's religious leadership and the Islamic system of government established after the 1979 revolution.

Rebel troops advancing towards Kinshasa First round of meeting between Mobutu, Kabila fails

KINSHASA, May 5: Rebels were advancing on Zaire's capital to Kinshasa today after President Mobutu Sese Seko refused to bow to a demand by their leader, Laurent Kabila, for his immediate resignation, reports Reuter.

South Africa's president Nelson Mandela said fresh talks would take place within eight to 10 days after the three men met on a South African ship but failed to broker a deal.

Kabila said his forces, reported by residents to be within 100 km (60 miles) of Kinshasa, would move on the capital while Mobutu considered the rebel demand.

Church sources said the rebels reached their new positions in one day, advancing from their previous forward base at Kenge, 200 km (125 miles) from the teeming city of

five million people.

A South African official said Mobutu's offer to hand over to an elected president was rejected. But mediators would be working in the next few days on a way for him to cede power to a transitional authority.

The understanding is that Kabila will want to lead that transitional authority," the official, who would not be named, said on board the converted ice-breaker Sas Outeniqua.

The idea was not to humiliate Mobutu, he said.

Kabila told Reuters by telephone from the ship in Congo's Pointe Noire: "If we make it to Kinshasa before the eight days then too bad but we cannot wait while he (Mobutu) makes up his mind."

AP adds: A face-to-face meeting between Zaire's ailing president and the rival who con-

trols nearly three-fourths of his country has resolved little — only that they plan to meet again.

President Mobutu Sese Seko did not announce his resignation, as had been predicted by diplomats aboard the South African naval vessel where talks were held Sunday. Mediators fear the talks were the last chance to secure a truce and prevent the rebels from marching on Zaire's capital, Kinshasa. All indications were that the rebels intend to keep advancing.

UN envoy Mohamed Sahnoun told reporters that Mobutu proposed a ceasefire and a transitional government to prepare the Central African nation for its first multiparty elections. Mobutu said he would hand over power to an elected authority, though he has never

ruled out running himself.

But rebel leader Laurent Kabila, according to the statement read by Sahnoun, demanded that the rebels be allowed to take power as the transitional authority and that Mobutu cede power to them.

AFP adds: Up to 150 refugees were crushed to death in a train Sunday that brought them from a refugee camp to Kisangani in eastern Zaire for repatriation to Rwanda, the UN refugee agency said.

An earlier UNHCR report spoke of about 100 dead and 50 injured.

The dead were discovered in the train when it arrived after a two-hour ride at an unloading area beside the River Zaire which divides Kisangani. Medical teams were treating the injured.



President Mobutu (L) and rebel leader Laurent Desire Kabila (R) flank South African President Nelson Mandela Sunday during a press conference on the South African naval vessel Outeniqua off Pointe Noire (Congo). — AFP/UNB photo