

# Marxists soften stand on self-rule talks with Tigers

AFP, Colombo

The key partner in Sri Lanka's coalition government yesterday climbed down from its headline stand on negotiations with Tamil Tiger rebels and said it was ready to accept talks on self-rule for the minority.

The Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, said the party was "flexible" in helping the government carry forward the Norwegian-brokered peace process, which has been stalled since April last year.

The JVP had been militantly opposed to a proposal by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to set up an Interim Self Governing Authority in the island's war-torn northeast ahead of a final deal.

"Every government had adapted to the changing needs of the time," said Lands Minister Anura Dissanayake, a senior member of the JVP.

"What we are saying is that we can have talks on an interim administration linked to a final settlement," Dissanayake told reporters.

The JVP, which gives crucial support

to President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government, had earlier said it would only accept an interim administration after a final peace deal had been struck.

Norway warned last week that Sri Lanka should do more to revive talks and work towards ending the ethnic conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972.

Dissanayake asked the LTTE also to show "flexibility" and resume talks.

"To show flexibility is not to kill political opponents and other rivals," Dissanayake said, referring to a spate of killings blamed on the Tigers in recent weeks.

Kumaratunga's office said Wednesday that she was ready to discuss the Tigers' proposal for self-rule "alongside the talks to reach a final solution acceptable to all communities."

She had earlier described the Tiger proposal as a "stepping stone to a separate state" for the Tamil minority. However, she softened her stand last month, according to officials close to the peace process.

# Musharraf keeps option open over Iraq troops

## Pak president warns of more violence

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf left open the possibility of sending Pakistani troops to Iraq in the future, telling a newspaper yesterday that it would be "very undiplomatic" to rule it for good.

"I never said we will send troops, but I also don't say that we will never send them," he told the Dawn newspaper.

However the level of domestic opposition to a troop deployment to Iraq made it impossible to send them right now, he noted.

"There is a domestic environment which is against it. So we cannot send troops in this environment," Musharraf was quoted as saying.

The general was also inflexible on certain conditions for deploying Pakistani troops to the strife-torn country.

The request must come from the Iraqi people and other Muslim countries send troops, he said.

The foreign ministry on Monday

ruled out sending troops in "present volatile and unstable" circumstances.

"There is no commitment whatsoever on troops deployment. The situation there is volatile and unstable...it does not make any sense," spokesman Masood Khan told a weekly press briefing.

Pakistan, which opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq without United Nations approval, turned down a US request last year to send peacekeepers to Iraq.

It has again been asked this year to send troops, but for the purpose of guarding future United Nations offices in Baghdad.

Two Pakistani hostages were executed by militant abductors in Iraq last week, prompting criticism of the government for not categorically ruling out sending troops there.

The victims' captors had issued messages citing earlier comments by Musharraf on the possibility of sending troops to Iraq, as one of their reasons for

holding the Pakistanis.

Pakistanis should expect more terror attacks as the government cracks down on Islamic militants, President Pervez Musharraf said in the interview after a series of high-profile al-Qaeda captures.

"Now we are acting against them, very actively. Previously nobody had the courage to do that. Nobody was touching religious organisations, now we are touching them," General Musharraf, who has narrowly escaped two assassination attempts blamed on al-Qaeda, told the Dawn newspaper.

"Therefore they will set off bomb blasts, they will create problems for you. Because we are arresting them and... we are eliminating masterminds."

"The nation should understand that they will keep on confronting us and this problem will be with us... (because) we take up issues and not put them under the carpet."



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf gestures at his office in Rawalpindi Wednesday during an interview with the Dawn. Musharraf left open the possibility of sending Pakistani troops to Iraq in the future, telling the newspaper yesterday that it would be "very undiplomatic" to rule it out for good.

# ABU GHRAIB ABUSE Witness terms England undisciplined

REUTERS, Fort Bragg

Pfc. Lynndie England was an undisciplined soldier who disobeyed orders to stop sleeping with a comrade, witnesses said Wednesday as prosecutors sharpened their attack on the woman who caused widespread outrage when she was pictured holding a naked Iraqi prisoner on a leash.

England, who defense lawyers have called a poster child for the Bush administration's flawed war policies, also made a snide remark when an Iraqi detainee at Abu Ghraib prison was forced to masturbate while soldiers watched, a witness said.

The testimony from England's fellow military police officers came on the second day of a hearing to determine if the pregnant England should stand trial for prisoner abuse in a scandal that shook US efforts to stabilise Iraq.

Prosecutors have attempted to portray England as a rogue soldier, in keeping with President Bush's statement that the abuse of prisoners was the fault of a small group.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Defence Secretary Ajai Vikram Singh (R) and Pakistani Defence Secretary Hamid Nawaz Khan (L) shake hands prior to a delegation level meeting at the Defence Ministry in New Delhi yesterday. India and Pakistan began talks to ease their military standoff on the Siachen glacier in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, considered the world's highest-elevation battlefield.

# Curfew clamped as Manipur erupts again

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, Imphal

Manipur chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh, on his return from New Delhi, was greeted today with a series of agitation as students and protestors courted arrest at several places in Imphal East and West which escalated tension in various places leading to pitched battle with the police.

Intensified agitation led the state government to reclamp the day curfew from 1.30 pm in Imphal West and 2.15 pm in the Imphal East district. Rapid Action Police Force had to be deployed and Imphal once again looked like a battle field.

At several places the police clashed with hundreds of protestors including students.

Police fired several stun bombs,

rubber bullets and tear gas shells at Raj Bahvan gate, Kakwa, Airport Road, Tera and Sagolband. The clash left hundreds injured. The police also arrested several women and student protestors.

Soon after his arrival Singh summoned a Cabinet meeting at 6 pm to take stock of the situation.

Police arrested 14 Opposition MLAs who violated CrPC 144 and staged dharna in front of the Assembly. They were later released in the afternoon. A 65-year-old man identified as Elangbam Surja of Hiyanglam died at Wahengbam Leikai while trying to board a bus in a hurry.

The Opposition also lambasted the Centre for appointing SS Sidhu as the Governor who, it alleged, is neck deep in corruption.

# 13 killed in Pak army helicopter crash

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani military helicopter crashed yesterday in a northwestern mountainous region, killing all 13 people on board, military said.

The crash took place in the forenoon after the pilot reported a technical fault and informed the control tower that he would be making emergency landing, a military spokesman said.

The helicopter came down in the hills of Daud Banda, 40km south of the garrison town of Kohat in the North West Frontier Province, the spokesman said.

The place is some 200 kilometers (125 miles) from a remote tribal region of South Waziristan near the Afghan border where Pakistan's military has been engaged in operations to flush out al-Qaeda linked militants.

# SECURITY CONCERN US embassy in Delhi shuts services

AGENCIES, New Delhi

The US embassy in New Delhi has shut down select departments, including visa immigration and library services yesterday due to security concerns, a TV report said.

"In light of security concerns, the consular (visa) section and the department of homeland security - immigration office and the information resource centre (American library) will close to the public on Thursday, Aug 5, 2004," a US embassy statement said on Wednesday.

Without elaborating on the "security concerns", the statement said the US consulates general in Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai would, however, remain

open for "business as usual".

The statement urged American citizens in India, who are not registered with the embassy, to do so "as soon as possible".

The embassy said visa appointments for Thursday would be rescheduled for a later date and applicants need not seek fresh appointments.

US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), had on Tuesday warned of a possible human bomb strike in Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore.

"According to the FBI alert, a lone terrorist may target either vital strategic installations or VIPs in any of these three cities," a senior police official had said on Tuesday.

# GUJARAT FLOOD RESCUE OPERATION

## Firefighters join troops

AFP, Ahmedabad

The death toll from monsoon rains in India hit nearly 880 yesterday as firefighters were called in to join soldiers rescuing people marooned by floods in the western state of Gujarat.

"For the whole monsoon season which began about two weeks ago, the death toll is now 179," A.K. Bargav, director general of police for Gujarat, told AFP. He said at least 18 other people were missing.

Flood waters which were up to 10 feet high (three metres) in places were

receding in southern Gujarat, worst hit in recent days by the annual monsoon, Gujarat relief commissioner V.A. Sathe said.

But weather officials said that more heavy rains were forecast for the western region, which had been facing drought, threatening economic growth in the agriculture-dependent country of more than one billion.

Gujarat officials have said the monsoon flooding which has destroyed mud homes and washed away crops and roads is the worst in the state since 1998.

# al-Qaeda using Pak soil for terror plot: Analysts

AFP, Islamabad

The recent arrests of high-profile al-Qaeda suspects have revealed the terrorist network is using Pakistan as a staging post for plotting attacks across the globe, analysts said Thursday.

al-Qaeda has effectively declared war on the Pakistani government led by General Pervez Musharraf, and most experts believe the group's leaders including Osama bin Laden are hiding in Pakistan's northern tribal areas.

"Despite three years of our efforts to chase these guys, we have not been able to degrade their network," Riffat Hussain, who heads the department of strategic studies at Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam university, told AFP.

"It indicates the problem is far more serious than one had anticipated. It also shows the resilience of al-Qaeda cells to re-group and revitalize, then operate and plan from these areas."

The arrest of at least 18 al-Qaeda suspects in the past three weeks represents the biggest haul so far in the nearly three-year hunt for militants since the September 11 attacks, which has already netted over 500 suspects.

# US can't give safety guarantee to Indians in Iraq

PTI, Washington

With efforts to secure release of three abducted Indians in Iraq still on, the US has said it cannot guarantee the safety of Indian and other South Asian workers against terrorists attack in the troubled nation.

"We can't promise protection to every worker that goes there. We all know that. That is the nature of the circumstances. It is a dangerous place. There are dangers and there are attacks on a variety of different targets in addition to coalition forces," US State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher said here on Wednesday.

His reply comes following a question about the workers from countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and others who are in Iraq though their countries are not part of the US-led coalition.

"There is a lot we can do generally to create a more secure environment working with the Iraqi Government. But, no, we can't promise protection for every worker."

"Increasingly, (there are) attacks on Iraqis who are trying to reconstruct their country, and we cannot offer protection for every single Iraqi," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officers cover their faces as they stand guard following an attack at a camp in Srinagar yesterday. Nine Indian policemen were killed and eight injured in an attack on their camp by one or more Kashmiri militants in the summer capital of Kashmir.