

Lanka accuses Tigers of breaking truce

Judge, bodyguard shot dead in Colombo

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government Friday accused Tamil Tiger guerrillas of breaking a Norwegian-arranged ceasefire by killing a government soldier and a military informant.

The government said in a statement that Thursday's killing of a soldier from the military intelligence unit and an informant had all the "hallmarks" of the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"This is a direct violation of the ceasefire agreement which calls on the parties not to engage in assassinations," the statement said. "The continuing violations cast doubt on the seriousness of the commitment of the LTTE."

The statement said it also raised

doubts about the LTTE's interest in observing the Norwegian-led peace initiative aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed.

Unidentified gunmen shot dead the two men in the island's east Thursday.

The attackers opened fire as the victim rode a motorcycle in the district of Polonnaruwa, the officials said, adding that investigations were under way to track down the killers.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The military has blamed similar attacks on the Tamil Tigers.

The government has accused the Tigers of killing more than 250 rivals, including military informants, since the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire went into effect from February 23, 2002.

Meanwhile, a gunman shot dead a Sri Lankan High Court judge and his police bodyguard as they returned to his official residence in a fashionable residential quarter here yesterday, police said.

Judge Sarath Ambedipita was killed as he exited his car with his bodyguard, police said.

Police said the gunman escaped and police cordoned off the Sarana Road area of Cinnamon Gardens in the diplomatic quarter of Colombo and launched a search.

The motive for the killing was not immediately known. The judge was known to have handed down record jail terms to child molesters.

Child rights activists said his slaying was a blow to their efforts to bring offenders to justice.

"Political party members

Myanmar sets free several NLD figures

AFP, Yangon

Military-ruled Myanmar yesterday freed several prominent opposition party figures as part of a mass prisoner release one month after a power struggle ousted the country's premier.

"We saw at least four persons including Win Tin being driven away in cars," the member said.

But the man who authorities have allowed to meet with Win Tin during his time in jail said that while the award-winning writer was "on the list to be released", there was no evidence he had been freed.

"I went to see him today but I was not allowed to go in," said the source who requested anonymity. "I will be seeing him there tomorrow."

Party spokesman U Lwin said he could not confirm the release either.

"All of this has been something of a surprise to us," U Lwin said.

Win Tin was arrested in July 1989 during crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, after civil unrest which had erupted the year before was brutally suppressed.

appeared to be released singly and driven away in cars to their homes," an NLD member told AFP outside the gates of Insein prison, where hundreds of people including 100 NLD members had gathered to welcome freed comrades.

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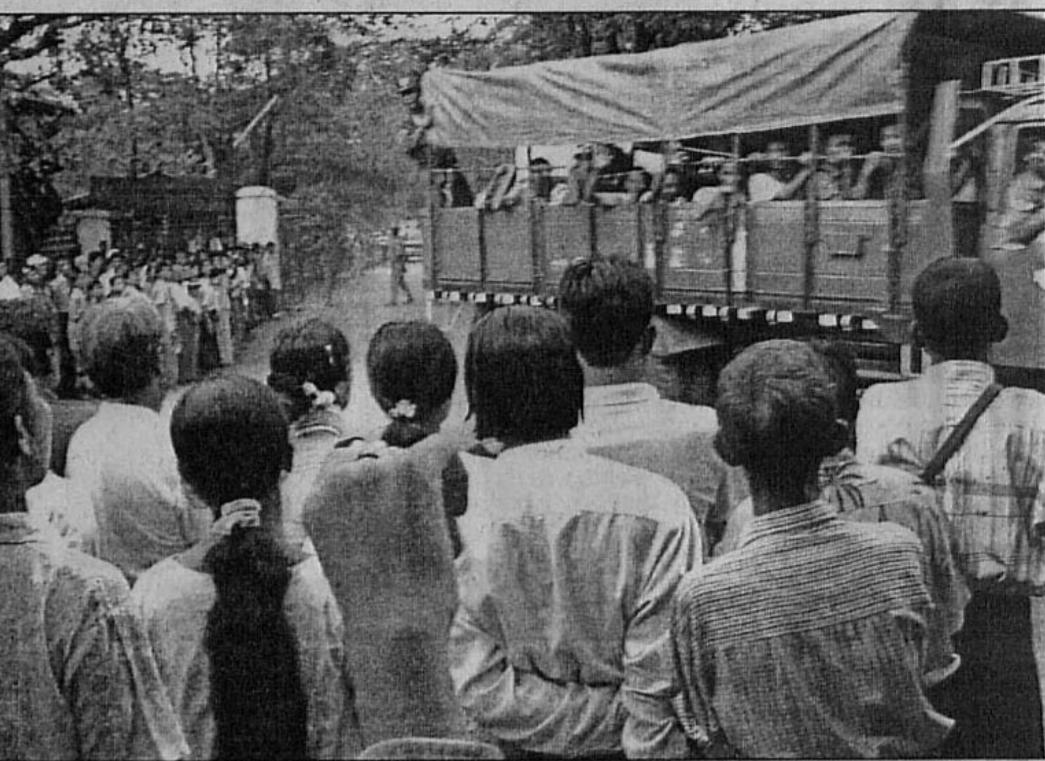
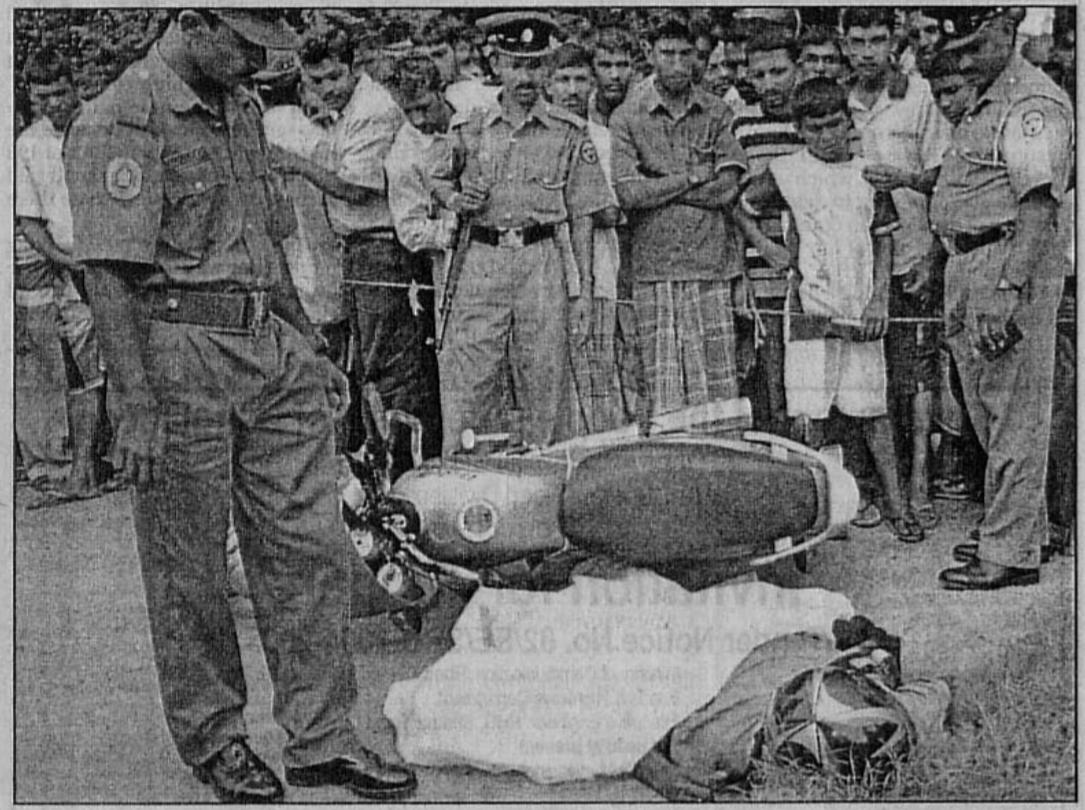


PHOTO: AFP

Released prisoners wave towards their relatives from a military truck on their way out of a notorious prison in Yangon yesterday. Several dozens prisoners were driven out of the jail, apparently heading for their freedom, while a crowd of some 100 Myanmar's National League for Democracy (NLD) members gathered at Insein's gates to welcome their freed comrades.



Police and residents look at the body of a slain Sri Lankan soldier from the military intelligence unit after he was gunned down while riding a motorcycle in the eastern Sri Lankan district of Polonnaruwa Thursday. There was no immediate claim of responsibility but the military has blamed similar attacks on the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam who are officially observing a truce with government forces.

Maoists torch buses, shoot dead college teacher in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels torched three buses and shot dead a college lecturer in separate incidents in western Nepal yesterday, police said.

The lecturer, identified as Indra Acharya of Tribhuvan University, was killed in a drive-by shooting carried out by two gunmen on a motorcycle as he was leaving his home in the tourist town of Pokhara, a police spokesman said.

The gunmen, whom police claim were Maoists, escaped after the shooting.

In the southwestern town of Palpa, meanwhile, rebels stopped two buses belonging to the state-run 'Sajha Yatayat' (cooperative transport service), off-loaded passengers, doused the vehicles with petrol and set them alight.

The Maoist rebels have been fighting to install a communist republic in the world's only Hindu kingdom since 1996. The uprising has claimed more than 10,000 lives.

No one was hurt in the incident and the rebels allowed passengers to offload their luggage before torching the buses, he said.

A Sajha Yatayat official said that with the latest incident the rebels had destroyed eight buses of the company in the past six months.

"We do not know why the Maoists have been destroying our buses, which are meant for public service," said company chief executive Mukund Satyal.

The service is 99 percent state-owned with one percent of shares being held by employees.

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UN adopts resolution on Sudan

Foes pledge to clinch peace deal by end of year

AFP, Nairobi

The UN Security Council yesterday unanimously adopted a resolution pushing for peace in war-ravaged Sudan, but it was immediately slammed by aid agencies as weak and wrong-headed.

The protagonists in Sudan's main civil war, which ignited in 1983, also pledged in an annex to the resolution to conclude two years of talks with a comprehensive peace accord by the end of the year.

Aimed at fostering "lasting peace and stability and to build a prosperous and united Sudan," the UN resolution 1574 specifically urges the Khartoum government and southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) to make good on that pledge.

It dangles the prospect of massive development aid if a deal is struck, and suggests its signing

would help to bring peace to other areas of Sudan, notably the western region of Darfur, where a separate conflict has spawned what the UN terms the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

It demanded that government and rebel forces in Darfur, where war erupted in February 2003 "cease all violence and attacks, including abduction (and) refrain from forcible relocation of civilians."

But it removed a direct threat of sanctions against Khartoum if it failed to end the violence.

Human rights groups place most of the blame for massive human rights abuses and crimes against humanity in Darfur on government forces and their allied militia.

And the international aid agency Oxfam was first off the mark to damn the resolution, slamming it even before it was officially adopted as "weak" and "dithering."

"Instead of responding to the

ongoing crisis" in Darfur "with concrete action, the Security Council could only agree to 'monitor compliance' with previous resolutions," Oxfam said in a statement.

"For the people of Darfur, 'monitoring compliance' has become UN speak for more death and suffering," the statement added.

While the resolution does indirectly recall that the threat of sanctions hangs over Khartoum if it fails to rein in militias blamed for widespread human rights abuses in Darfur, it stipulates that such sanctions would only be effected after yet another resolution.

Although Oxfam recognised that the point of the resolution was to push for a north-south peace deal and that this would have long-term benefits in Darfur, the agency stressed that "people are dying there everyday."

US mulls direct assistance to Palestinian Authority

Qorei calls for end to 'armed chaos'

PTI, AFP, Washington/ Gaza City

accounted for and used in the way it was intended," Ereli said.

"We only gave it when we were assured and confident that the institutions and processes to guarantee accountability and transparency were in place," he said.

Outgoing US Secretary of State Colin Powell is scheduled to hold talks in Israel and with Palestinians on the West Bank on Sunday and Monday. He told reporters on Wednesday that he wanted to discuss moves for the establishment of a Palestinian state, co-existing peacefully with Israel.

"It's an idea that is under consideration," the State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli said on Thursday.

"No decision has been made," the US official said, declining to say how much aid the administration intended to give to the Palestinian Authority.

"We are interested in ways that we can help support the Palestinian people and the Palestinian leadership as they try to emerge from the past years of conflict and violence," Ereli said.

Against the backdrop of US accusations of corruption, the administration this year bypassed the Authority and contributed US\$ 127 million to Palestinians through the United Nations and private groups.

"The current chaos is in no one's interest, except for those who benefit from it personally," said Qorei who also heads the National

Security Council.

He said that the dominant Fatah party was examining ways "to put an end to armed chaos, maintain order and impose the rule of law."

Following a meeting of the Fatah central committee later Thursday, a statement was issued that also called for "rapidly putting an end to the security chaos."

Feared that Yasser Arafat's death last week could worsen the already fragile security situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were underway on Sunday when gunmen opened fire inside a mourning tent for the late Palestinian leader.

The gunfire erupted shortly after the arrival of new Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chairman Mahmud Abbas, who led an unsuccessful campaign while prime minister last year to persuade militants to lay down their weapons.

He did manage to secure an agreement among factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad to halt their campaign of anti-Israeli attacks, but the ceasefire broke down after just seven weeks.

Two killed in Baghdad mosque clash

2 die in car bomb attack as Iraqi troops prepare assault in Mosul

AFP, Reuters, Baghdad

Iraqi national guardsmen raided a Sunni mosque in Baghdad after Juma prayers, sparking bloody clashes, an AFP correspondent reported, while in the northern city of Mosul US-backed Iraqi commandos were poised to storm rebel strongholds.

A suspected suicide car bomb exploded as a convoy of five police vehicles drove past in Baghdad yesterday, killing at least two people and wounding five, police said.

Thick smoke rose from the site of the blast and ambulances raced to the scene, sirens wailing. At least three gutted cars smoldered in the center of the road, as firefighters hosed them with water.

Guerrillas have repeatedly attacked Iraq's police and security forces.

Medical sources said two Iraqis were killed and nine wounded, eight of them in serious condition," said Amin Lamin from Al-Numan hospital.

Some 200 to 300 national guardsmen stormed the mosque after prayers, throwing hand grenades and firing shots in the air, the correspondent said.

Their purpose was not immediately clear but some worshippers gathered outside, said the troops had arrested the mosque imam, Sheikh Muayed al-Adhami.

During his sermon, the imam had charged that after their onslaught on the rebel city of Fallujah in western Iraq, US forces would target Latifiyah.

The town, which lies a few kilometers south of Baghdad, commands access to most of southern Iraq from the capital and has become known as an area where scores of Iraqis and foreigners have been killed or kidnapped by Sunnis.

Soon after the guardsmen moved on the mosque, US forces arrived and entered and then posted soldiers on the roof. Women were allowed to leave the premises but men were trapped inside.



Clinton says Iraq war alienated US from world

Former US president Bill Clinton on Thursday slammed the handling of the war in Iraq by his successor George W. Bush, saying the conflict alienated the United States from the world.

"I supported giving the president the authority to take action against Saddam Hussein if he did not cooperate with the UN inspectors or if he was found to have had weapons of mass destruction he wouldn't give up," Clinton, at the inauguration of his presidential library here, told ABC television.

"I believe that the administration made a mistake going to war when they did, and that's what alienated the world. And most Americans still haven't focused on this," Clinton said.

Speaking on the same program, his wife, Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, told ABC she planned to run for re-election to the Senate, which I am very excited about," she said when asked about a possible White House run for her own in 2008.



Activists of the six-party Islamic Alliance Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) shout anti-US slogans during a protest rally in Karachi yesterday. Pakistani Islamist parties staged demonstrations against the killing of civilians in the ongoing conflict in Iraq.

EX-COUNTER-TERRORISM CHIEF CLARKE SAYS CIA infiltrated al-Qaeda before 9/11

AFP, Washington

The CIA had infiltrated al-Qaeda before the September 11 attacks, but at levels too low to know of the plot, according to former White House counter-terrorism chief Richard Clarke.

Clarke said that in 1999, former CIA director George Tenet ordered spies to penetrate al-Qaeda for information on its leader, Osama bin Laden.

"Over the course of the subsequent three years they did go form (censored) penetrations of one sort or another, none of them very high level," Clark told members of Congress in June 2002 during closed-door testimony whose censored transcript was released this week.

"We could not conduct those military strikes to kill bin Laden, because we never knew where he was going to be in advance."

"And usually we were only informed about where he was after the

British parliament forces through ban on fox hunting

AFP, London

Britain's parliament has forced through a ban on fox hunting, leaving Prime Minister Tony Blair facing the prospect of massive civil disobedience from hunters in the run-up to an imminent general election.

A law ending the centuries-old pursuit, the subject of a furious debate in parliament for years, was only passed with the use of a rarely-invoked law overruling the wishes of the unelected upper chamber, the House of Lords.

The Parliament Act -- used Thursday for only the fourth time since it was introduced in 1949 -- allows the lower chamber, the House of Commons, to force a law onto the statute books single-handedly if the two houses of parliament simply cannot agree.

Worries over missile and nuclear

Rice wants even more solid ties with India

AP, New Delhi

Condoleezza Rice, chosen to replace US Secretary of State Colin Powell, has told her Indian counterpart that she wants to expand the already "great relationship" between the two nations in the next four years, the government said yesterday.