

## Lanka invokes tough anti-terror laws

Opposition marches for early polls, Tigers issue war warning

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka invoked tough anti-terrorism laws yesterday as tens of thousands of opposition supporters marched on the capital, ending a 10-day procession from the island's south to demand early general elections.

The final 10-kilometre (six-mile) leg of the march began in a Colombo suburb and was expected to end in the late afternoon at the main Lipton Circus area for a public meeting to be addressed by opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"Hundreds of thousands of people are joining the rally," said opposition United National Party (UNP) deputy leader Karu Jayasuriya.

"This, we believe, is the largest crowd ever seen in Colombo.

"We don't know the exact numbers, but it could be hundreds of thousands."

Traffic police unofficially estimated the crowd at around 100,000.

The march began 10 days ago, with UNP leader and former premier Wickremesinghe and supporters setting off from the southern tip of Sri Lanka, 170km from Colombo, a city of about 600,000 people.

Several roads in the capital were closed to traffic as the procession wound through the suburbs. Police stepped up security with the deployment of 3,000 constables, said Colombo police chief Pujith

Jayasundara.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga declared her official residence and the immediate neighbourhood a "high security zone" and banned processions or heavy vehicles from entering the area.

Officials said Kumaratunga, in her role as defence minister, had issued an "extraordinary" gazette notification dated Friday in which she invoked the provisions of the tough Prevention of Terrorism Act to declare the ban.

The restriction also applies to three luxury hotels, including the Colombo Hilton and the World Trade Centre building, with owners compelled to declare details of all occupants to security authorities.

Meanwhile, at least eight policemen and a soldier were wounded in suspected Tamil rebel attacks in strike-bound northeastern Sri Lanka yesterday, a day after the guerrillas warned of a return to war.

In a separate statement, the Tigers on Monday evening warned that Sri Lanka could slip back into war and accused the government of provoking them to break a fragile Norwegian-brokered truce.

"We say this because we have repeatedly raised this issue in the past, and in spite of this the government is murdering our people and is carrying out a shadow war against us," LTTE's political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan said in a letter to truce monitors.



Police and forensic officers search a house on Colwyn road, in the Beeston area of Leeds which was raided last morning in connection with last week's bombings in London. Police raided five locations in northern England early yesterday in an operation "directly connected" with last week's bombings in London, but said no arrests had yet been made.

## Long identification process for London bomb victims

AFP, London

British police were yesterday expected to formally identify more of the 50-plus victims of the London terrorist bombings as reports speculated that a suspect might also be named imminently.

Although dozens are missing and presumed by their loved ones to have perished in one of the four explosions last Thursday morning, thus far only two of the dead have been formally identified.

London's Metropolitan Police has set up a massive temporary mortuary on a military barracks just east of the city centre where relatives are being taken to identify victims, more of whom were likely to be named imminently.

Police were also continuing a painstaking search for evidence at the sites of the bombs, three on subway trains and one on a packed bus, which killed a total of at least 52 people, Britain's worst post-World War II attack.



Sri Lanka's main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe (C) waves to crowds from the roof of a car as he directs a protest march into Colombo yesterday. Thousands of opposition supporters marched on the Sri Lankan capital, ending a 10-day procession aimed at pressuring President Chandrika Kumaratunga to call early national elections.

## Pro-Syrian defence minister injured in Lebanon blast

AFP, Beirut

Lebanon's pro-Syrian Defence Minister Elias Murr was wounded yesterday by a car bomb outside Beirut that killed at least two and injured six others in the latest attack on a leading political figure.

Murr was driving himself from his home in an upscale Christian suburb 10km north of the capital when an estimated 40 kilograms (90 pounds) of TNT exploded in a nearby parked car.

The explosion killed two unidentified people, according to state television, and left nine others wounded aside from Murr. Seven cars were completely destroyed by the blast, which left a scene of devastation that has become all too familiar for Beirut residents.

Murr, deputy prime minister and son-in-law of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud, was taken with superficial burns and a hand injury to Serhal hospital, from where he issued a statement aimed at "reassuring the Lebanese".

"Thank God I am in good health and I wish a speedy recovery for all the bodyguards and the wounded. We must support them as the country is going through a very difficult period," he said from his hospital bed.

This was the third apparent attack on a leading political figure within the space of less than two months. However the previous two bomb blasts that killed a journalist and an ex-communist leader targeted anti-Syrian figures.

Syria, which pulled its troops out from Lebanon in April amid relentless international pressure following the February assassination of anti-Damascus former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, fiercely condemned the new attack.

"Syria considers this terrorist act as one link in a series of explosions and assassinations aimed at destabilising Lebanon and weakening its national unity," the official Sana agency quoted an information ministry official as saying.

Druze leader Walid Jumblatt claimed that the attack was aimed at silencing a man who could potentially give incriminating evidence to international investigators still probing the Hariri murder.

## 'Rebels burn 39 villagers alive in Congo'

REUTERS, Kinshasa

Rwandan rebels burned 39 people alive when they torched a village in eastern Congo in what some locals said was punishment for supporting United Nations peacekeepers, a UN spokeswoman said on Monday.

UN forces have stepped up activity in the South Kivu province in the past week to try to improve security following a spate of attacks blamed on Rwandan rebels based in the lawless regions on Democratic Republic of Congo's eastern border.

"Thirty-nine civilians were burned alive after being locked in their huts, another seven are injured," said Sylvie van den Wildenberg, a spokeswoman for the UN mission in Congo, referring to the attack that happened late on Saturday.

"The vast majority were women and children," she said by telephone from the eastern town of Bukavu. "Some people said it was in retaliation for a recent Congolese army attack on the rebels. Others said it was to discourage people from supporting an increasingly present UN mission," she said.

## MAOIST TALKS OFFER Nepali leaders give cautious welcome

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's political leaders, sidelined by a royal power grab five months ago, yesterday welcomed a Maoist offer for talks on resolving the country's crisis but questioned the rebels' sincerity.

"We think the Maoist statement is a positive sign, but some clarifications are needed to create an atmosphere of mutual trust," said Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal.

He added that the rebels should

first lay down their arms, ending a conflict that has claimed about 12,000 lives since 1996 in the Himalayan kingdom.

"To prove their sincerity and genuine desire for talks, the Maoists should make a formal announcement (on giving up their arms) from their party's plenum," Nepal told AFP.

On Monday, Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, also known as Prachanda ("The Fierce"), called for talks with an alliance of seven political parties working to restore democracy in Nepal after February's royal takeover of power.

## Britain urges EU to act quickly on security law

AFP, Brussels

Britain's foreign minister, Jack Straw, urged the European Union yesterday to quickly pass new security legislation allowing access to telecommunications data in the wake of the London bombing attacks.

"I believe that provided there are proper safeguards that no one's civil liberties are threatened by retention and access to data, but the protection of everybody is more greatly enhanced," he said at the European Parliament.

"There has, I know, been some hesitancy on some dossiers, particularly on this issue of the retention and access to telecommunications data ... on the perfectly justifiable

grounds of civil liberties," he said.

"I understand those concerns," said Straw, speaking at an "exchange of views" with the parliament's committee on foreign affairs in Brussels.

It was his first address to members since the Thursday morning rush-hour bombings, which killed at least 52 people and injured some 700 in the British capital's underground rail system and on a bus.

"I hope that we can, within this forum, consent to agreeing that and also to more rapid implementation of aspects of counter-terrorist legislation already agreed to, for the example the freezing of assets," he said.

## UN reform debate drags on

US refuses to endorse G4's UNSC expansion plan

AFP, REUTERS, United Nations

The UN General Assembly opened a divisive debate Monday on a controversial draft resolution by Brazil, Germany, India and Japan to expand the powerful Security Council, an initiative bitterly opposed by some of their regional rivals.

Brazil's UN envoy Ronaldo Mota Sardenberg introduced the draft from the so-called G4, which calls for enlarging the Council from the current 15 members to 25 by creating six new permanent seats without veto power and four non-permanent seats.

The G4 countries are pressing for an early vote on the draft, which is co-sponsored by 23 countries including France, possibly as early as late this week.

Sardenberg said the security structure established in 1945 when the UN was created was "now glaringly outdated."

He said that a more balanced membership of the council was needed to reflect "new realities" and to be responsive to the views and needs of all member states, in particular developing countries.

The draft does not spell out which countries would secure the new Council seats but diplomats said the six new permanent seats would go to the G4 and two African countries yet to be selected.

At present, Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States are the only permanent and veto-wielding members of the powerful UN body, which also has 10 rotating non-permanent members without veto power.

The proposed expansion of the Security Council is part of a broader plan to overhaul the United Nations, which is spearheaded by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and

world leaders will discuss it at a summit in September ahead of the annual General Assembly session.

The United States said yesterday it supports Japan's bid for a UN Security Council seat but stopped short of endorsing a UN reform proposal made by the Group of Four -- Japan, Germany, India and Brazil.

"I reaffirmed to the foreign minister our support for a Japanese seat on the United Nations Security Council," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters after holding talks with Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura in Tokyo.

The sole metro line in the Polish capital Warsaw was closed yesterday following a bomb alert, police spokesman Marcin Szyndler said, less than a week after the bomb attacks in London's Underground system.

"We've received information about an explosive charge in the metro. In order to verify this information, the metro line had to be closed to the public," the spokesman said.

"We cannot ignore any information of this kind. Our teams of experts are checking right now," he added.

## US reviews ban on its troops in London

AFP, London

The US military yesterday lifted a ban on personnel entering London in the wake of last week's attacks which had angered police and politicians keen to show that life is returning to normal.

Some 10,000 US servicemen and women at two air bases in the east of England were ordered to keep out of London after bombs exploded on four subway trains and a double-decker bus -- the worst attack in Britain since World War II.

But the commander of US forces in Europe James L. Jones said he has lifted the travel restriction.

"Our thoughts are with the families and friends of those killed or injured in last week's attacks," Jones said in a statement.

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Lebanese security forces and civilians gather at the scene of a car bomb attack in Beirut yesterday. Lebanon's outgoing pro-Syrian Defence Minister Elias Murr was wounded in a car bomb explosion in a Christian suburb north of Beirut that killed at least two people and wounded six others, police said.