



Supporters cheer for Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse as he comes out of the Election Commission office in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka's elections chief formally declared socialist Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse the winner of the island nation's presidential polls.

# Tigers outfox dove to dim Lankan peace hopes

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tiger rebels deliberately ditched the man who signed a truce with them and cleared the way for his hawkish rival to win the presidency in a calculated move that has dashed peace hopes, analysts said Friday.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) prevented Tamils from participating in Thursday's presidential election thereby blocking votes that many expected to hand victory to opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

"What the Tigers have done is to ensure Mr. Wickremesinghe's defeat," said political analyst and former air force chief Harry Gunatillake. "They may have calculated that he was the

more formidable man to deal with."

Wickremesinghe entered a ceasefire with the LTTE in 2002 and lost his job as prime minister. President Chandrika Kumaratunga sacked him, charging he had jeopardised national security by inking the truce.

Instead of delivering the minority Tamil votes to Wickremesinghe, the Tigers staged a virtual boycott and let in the hardline nationalist candidate Mahinda Rajapakse, the incumbent prime minister.

Rajapakse's tough approach to peace appears to better suit the Tigers' own reluctance to return to talks.

Gunatillake noted the Tigers have struggled to control a damaging split and want more time to rally their

rank.

Asked if he felt let down by the Tigers, Wickremesinghe said: "I had no deal with them to feel let down."

Wickremesinghe, who had earned a reputation as a keen strategist and a shrewd negotiator, appeared to have been led up the garden path by the Tigers and then ditched.

"I was never expecting to win with the votes in Jaffna," Wickremesinghe told AFP as it became clear that the Tamils were staying at home. "If you can't win in the (Sinhalese majority) south, you can't win the country," he said.

Diplomats involved in Sri Lanka's Norwegian-backed peace process had banked on Wickremesinghe winning the presidency to inject new dynamism

into a moribund peace initiative.

However, his defeat has seen putting the clock back on the peace process.

The new president has vowed he will not turn the country into a federal state and is against power sharing with minority Tamils.

"What was important about Wickremesinghe's plan was power sharing," said Sunanda Deshapriya, director at the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) think tank. "All that would be in question now."

The Tiger move to keep away voters is exactly what Rajapakse's camp had wanted but could not achieve even through a supreme court petition.

## Manmohan makes minor cabinet changes

PTI, New Delhi

Giving up plans for any fresh induction into his ministry, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Friday effected a minor reshuffle of portfolios retaining External Affairs while shifting S Jaipal Reddy from Information and Broadcasting to Urban Development and Priya Ranjan Dasmuni from Water Resources to I&B.

Singh confined Friday's reshuffle, necessitated by the Winter session of Parliament beginning next Wednesday, to portfolios held by Congress ministers while also retaining the Coal portfolio which was taken from JMM leader Shibu Soren last year when he went to Ranchi to become Jharkhand Chief Minister.

# 'Nepali Maoists ready to accept democracy'

REUTERS, AFP, New Delhi/ Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebels are ready to accept multiparty democracy, stop terrorising civilians and return to the political mainstream of the revolt-torn country, a top Nepali politician said yesterday.

"We held talks with them about two weeks ago in Nepal," Madhav Kumar Nepal, a former deputy prime minister and head of the Communist Party of Nepal-UML, told Reuters during a visit to the Indian capital for medical treatment.

"They have given a positive response to the three points we raised: accept multiparty democracy, stop terrorising and killing innocent people, accept the democratic process and return to the political mainstream," he said.

The United Nations and donor agencies have condemned new rules imposed by Nepal that they say restrict their freedom and represent "undue political interference".

Nepal, where King Gyanendra seized power in February, introduced the "Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Code of Conduct" last week in

the Himalayan nation, which is racked by a deadly Maoist conflict.

The code orders non-governmental groups to coordinate their activities with the government but the NGOs say the new rules severely restrict their ability to function effectively.

"The Code of Conduct is not conducive either to improving NGO governance or to fostering NGO endeavours," UN Resident Coordinator, Matthew Kahane, said Thursday in an appeal on behalf of Nepal's donor community to scrap the rules.

## EU commissioner calls for Kashmir peace

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and India should harness the mood of cooperation forged in the wake of the massive South Asian earthquake to achieve lasting peace in Kashmir, a senior European Union official said yesterday.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU's commissioner for external affairs, said the two rivals should use the tragedy to begin rebuilding trust eroded by decades of conflict over the disputed Himalayan region.

"There's a small light in (the quake) for the difficult conflict in Kashmir," Ferrero-Waldner said after

touring quake-devastated cities in the mountainous north.

"I think this is a good opportunity and ... more positive steps should be encouraged," she added.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, a desolate region that is divided between them but claimed in full by both.

Four crossing points were opened along the heavily militarised Line of Control that divides the two zones in the wake of the October 8 quake to aid the relief effort for the estimated 3.5 million homeless.

# Kashmiris get ready to cross border

AFP, Srinagar

After weeks of waiting, Indian Kashmiris will today finally get a chance to cross the de facto border dividing Kashmir to help quake-hit relatives, a senior Indian official said.

"The Line of Control (LoC) will be thrown open for civilians to cross on Saturday," foreign ministry official L. Sree Ramulu told AFP yesterday.

Indian Kashmiris were delighted by the announcement that they could visit relatives in Pakistani Kashmir, hardest

hit by the massive October 8 quake, but said it had been too long in coming and it was too hard to get permission.

"I want to go and help my relatives rebuild their homes and lives," said Jamal-u-Din who lives in Uroosa village near the ceasefire line dividing the mountainous region between nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan.

"I hope my presence will make them feel better," he said.

On Saturday Indian Kashmiris will be allowed to use the Tithwal-Nauseri

crossing, 180 kilometers (111 miles) northwest of the summer capital Srinagar, said Ramulu.

"It's very good news for us," said Abdul Aziz, 43, from the border town of Uri. "I'm eager to cross over and help my relatives rebuild their homes."

Ramulu could not immediately say, however, how many civilians would be allowed Saturday to traverse the heavily militarised ceasefire line from Indian Kashmir, where a deadly revolt is raging against New Delhi's rule.

## India holds war games near Pakistan border

AFP, New Delhi

India's military yesterday staged a grand finale to major military manoeuvres, showcasing newly-acquired T-90 battle tanks and warplanes close to the border with Pakistan in the Thar desert.

The Indian military said New Delhi gave advance notice of the 14-day exercises codenamed "Operation Desert Strike" to neighbouring Pakistan in line with a pact between the nuclear-armed rivals, who are engaged in a slow-moving peace process to end their decades-old feud over Kashmir.

"Such exercises show our capability and ability," said Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee. He said, however, the war games were not designed to intimidate India's neighbours.

"India does not have any territorial designs...all our capabilities are just aimed at protecting our interests," Mukherjee said as supersonic jets dived in mock attacks.

Officials said the exercise was the biggest since the 1987 Operation Brass Tacks in the desert state of Rajasthan, which sent tensions skyrocketing between India and Pakistan. The two countries have fought three wars, two over the Himalayan state of Kashmir.

Forty-two observers and diplomats from 30 countries including Bangladesh, Britain, China, France and the United States were at the war games in Pokhran.

"We welcome such observers," the defence minister said.

The army chief General J.J. Singh said Beijing had invited New Delhi and Moscow to send observers to recent Chinese exercises. Ties between India and China, which fought a border war four decades ago, have warmed in recent years.

"Our men also went to China and so we invited them as we are just showing our capabilities and we hope there will be better cooperation in the future," Singh, head of India's 1.4-million strong army, told reporters in Pokhran.

# UN experts cancel Guantanamo visit

AFP, Vienna

A group of United Nations experts yesterday called off their planned visit to the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba saying Washington was not allowing them free access to detainees there.

"Since the Americans have not accepted the minimum requirements for such a visit, we must cancel," Manfred Nowak, the UN envoy in charge of investigating torture allegations around the world, told AFP in Vienna.

The trip had been planned for December 6.

Earlier in Geneva, the five experts, including Nowak, issued a statement in which they said deeply regretted a US rejection of private interviews with

the prisoners during the scheduled visit.

The December 6 date had been set after more than three years of discussions between US authorities and the UN amid claims of human rights breaches at the prison.

"Under the circumstances, we will not be travelling to Guantanamo," their statement said, because "doing so would undermine the principles" of UN human rights fact-finding missions.

"It is particularly disappointing that the United States government, which has consistently declared its commitment to the principles of independence and objectivity of the fact-finding mechanisms, was not in a position to accept these terms."

# 'CIA, foreign agencies in anti-terror network' Europe avoids pressing US on 'secret prisons'

REUTERS, Washington

The CIA has established joint facilities in more than two dozen countries where US and foreign intelligence agents work together to hunt suspected terrorists, The Washington Post reported yesterday.

Citing current and former American and foreign intelligence officials, the newspaper said the CIA has operated the joint intelligence centres in Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

The Americans and their counterparts at the secret Counterterrorist Intelligence Centres, known as CTCs, make daily decisions on when and how

to capture suspects, interrogations and detentions and how to disrupt al-Qaeda support.

The CTCs are separate from the covert CIA prisons known as "black sites" that the CIA has run in eight countries, The Washington Post said.

It said the CIA declined comment for the article.

The newspaper said the CTCs were "part of a fundamental, continuing shift in the CIA's mission that began shortly after the 2001 attacks" and was orchestrated by former CIA director George Tenet.

Earlier European governments have avoided pressing Washington to

address allegations it runs secret prisons in the region despite growing public concern over US detainee policies, diplomats said on Thursday.

In the face of persistent media questions, the Bush administration has refused to confirm or deny newspaper reports and rights groups' accusations this month it has kept Islamic militants incommunicado in Europe.

European media have increasingly delved in recent weeks into CIA flights suspected of transferring "ghost detainees" around the continent and some countries have begun looking into the movements.



Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf (R) gestures as he walks alongside United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (L) upon their arrival in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan administered Kashmir yesterday.

## German parties formally sign coalition pact

AFP, Berlin

The leaders of Germany's two main political parties yesterday formally signed an agreement forming the first left-right coalition government since the 1960s, with Angela Merkel to be the country's first female chancellor.

Merkel's Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats (SPD) of outgoing Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder were forced into a power-sharing agreement by inconclusive elections on September 18.

Merkel said her hope was that the incoming government would enable Germans to be better off in four years' time than they are today, in a country she said was in dire need of an economic upturn.

# Democrats, Bush admin escalate battle over Iraq

AFP, Washington

Democrats and the White House traded fresh salvos over US Iraq policy Thursday, as a top Democratic lawmaker introduced a bill demanding an immediate withdrawal of US troops there.

Representative John Murtha's bill, the first to demand an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, stunned official Washington.

The veteran US lawmaker said that the US military operation in Iraq is a lost cause.

"Our military has done everything

that has been asked of them, the US cannot accomplish anything further in Iraq militarily," said Murtha, a Vietnam War veteran considered more hawkish than most members of his party.

"It's time to bring them home," Murtha said.

His resolution came two days after the Senate approved a Republican measure requiring the White House provide quarterly updates on the pace of military and policy gains in Iraq, in a signal that anxiety over the Iraq operation was spreading to members of Bush's own party.

Recent opinion polls have found

that the US public is also increasingly war-weary, with the number of US military deaths now well over 2,000, and the billions of US dollars spent there mounting every week.

Partisan sparring reached new levels after Vice President Dick Cheney on Wednesday called Democrats' accusations that the administration misled the country into the Iraq war "reprehensible" and "pernicious."

His remarks followed at least two broadsides against Democrats since Friday by President George W. Bush, currently in South Korea to attend an Asia-Pacific summit.

## Attack on Lanka mosque kills 4

AP, Colombo

Suspected separatist rebels tossed grenades into a Mosque during morning prayers yesterday, killing at least four Muslim worshippers, police said.

The attack came a day after Sri Lanka held its presidential election, which was boycotted by the Tamil Tiger rebels.

"Two grenades were thrown at the mosque that killed four people and wounded 10 others," said Nimal Lewke, deputy inspector general of police.

There were no other immediate details of the attack in the city of Akkaraipattu, 140 miles east of the capital, Colombo.