

Blast rocks Lankan truce

Monitors call for calm after 6 soldiers killed

AFP, Colombo

Six soldiers were killed in a landmine blast in northern Sri Lanka yesterday, the military said amid an upsurge in violence that prompted Scandinavian truce monitors to warn of "irreparable" damage to the country's four-year-old ceasefire.

The six men were killed and another injured when their vehicle triggered a mine planted by suspected Tamil Tiger rebels in Jaffna, 400km north of the capital Colombo, an official said.

"The troops were transporting lunch for their colleagues when they were caught up in the explosion," a military official in the area said. "We believe it is the work of the Tigers."

The official said another soldier was killed in a Tiger attack overnight in the same area.

In other violence, one soldier

was shot dead Saturday in northern Sri Lanka while three civilians were killed in the eastern port city of Trincomalee on Sunday.

Sunday's blast was the worst against government troops since they entered a truce with the Tigers in February 2002.

A Norwegian-led truce monitoring panel, in a statement, expressed concern over the latest upsurge in violence and urged the government and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to calm the situation.

"We urge them and all other community leaders to use their influence to ensure that violence and attacks come to an immediate end," the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said.

"The SLMM warns that there is a real danger that these disturbances and hostilities can spread and result in irreparable deterioration of security and prevent any real restoration of normalcy in the affected communities."

The statement came after the LTTE put the new government of President Mahinda Rajapakse on notice last month to come up with a solution to the island's drawn out Tamil separatist conflict which has claimed over 60,000 lives since 1972.

The LTTE warned that they would next year begin their campaign for independence and set up a homeland unless there was a political settlement to their conflict.

The LTTE has been fighting for total independence in the island's northeast, but in December 2002 agreed to settle for extensive devolution of power under a federal system.

In recent weeks, there had been tension in the Jaffna peninsula, the former capital of the

Tigers. Tensions heightened Friday after the killing of two Tiger rebels by unidentified gunmen.

The LTTE has accused the Sri Lankan military of supporting a breakaway faction. The Sri Lankan military denies the charges.

In the island's northeastern district of Trincomalee, police Sunday found three bullet-ridden bodies of Tamil civilians who had been taken away Saturday night by Tiger rebels, police said.

They said a fourth man escaped with serious injuries and was admitted to hospital.

Sri Lankan Tamils constitute about 12.6 percent of Sri Lanka's 19.6 million population, while Muslims, make up about 7.5 percent. The mainly Buddhist Sinhalese are the majority community.



Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is saying goodbye to his Cabinet colleagues at his residence in New Delhi yesterday before his departure for a three-day visit to Russia. The India-Russia relationship is an important factor in the creation of a secure and stable multi-polar world, Singh said ahead of his departure.

Key al-Qaeda figure killed in Pakistan

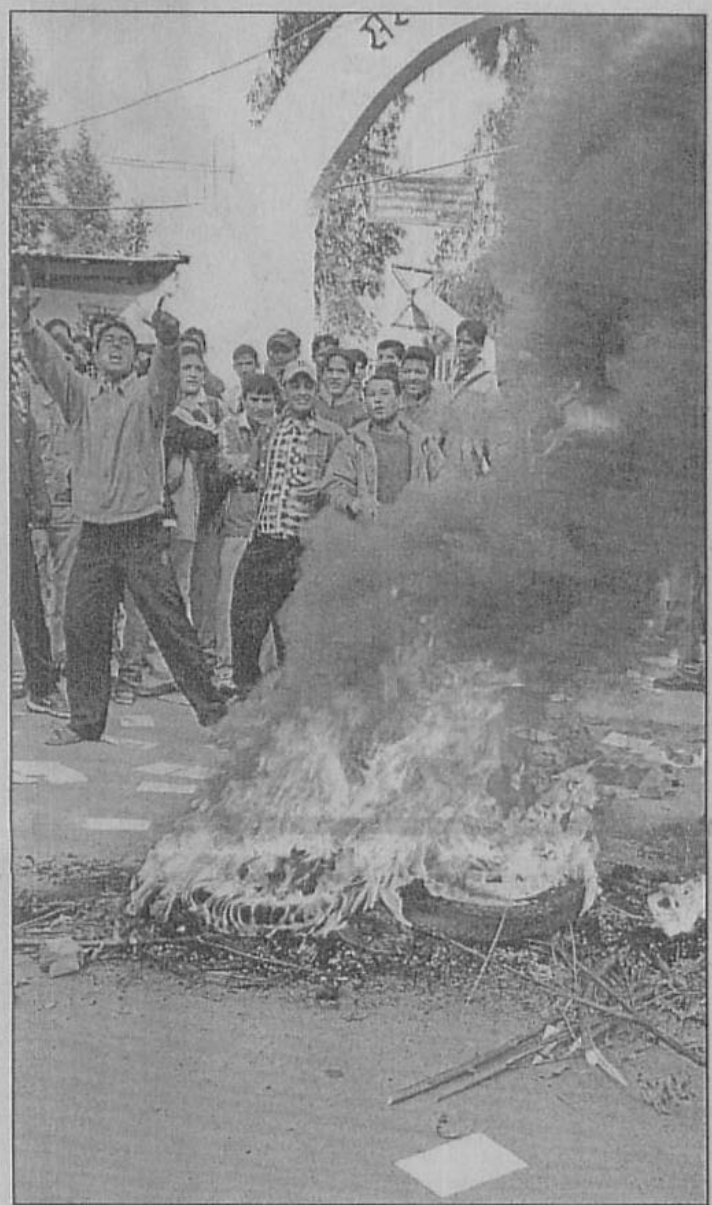
AP, Islamabad

One of al-Qaeda's top five leaders, said to be responsible for planning overseas strikes, was killed by Pakistani security forces in a rocket attack near the Afghan border with US help, American and Pakistani officials said Saturday.

Hamza Rabbia, a key associate of al-Qaeda No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahiri, died Thursday in an explosion in the North Waziristan tribal area, and his remains were identified in DNA tests, Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said.

Two US counterterrorism officials, who spoke only on condition of anonymity because of the information's sensitivity, confirmed Rabbia's death but would not elaborate on the circumstances.

The officials said Rabbia was believed to be an Egyptian and head of al-Qaeda's foreign operations, possibly as senior as the No. 3 official in the terrorist group. That would put him in a tier just below Osama bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.



Nepalese pro-communist students shout slogans and burn tyres outside the Saraswati Campus as they protest against an alleged monarchist attack on a Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML) office in Kathmandu yesterday.

Anti-West feeling runs high ahead of Iraq polls

Voters want Americans to go home, politician, police commander killed

REUTERS, AP, Baghdad

Anti-Western feeling is running high ahead of Iraq's election this month and many voters think sending US troops home should be the priority of the next government, an informal survey by Reuters indicated.

Campaigning for the December 15 parliamentary election has not focused much on the US-led occupation, but one finding of a survey of dozens of voters by Reuters was the desire for foreign troops to leave the country.

In the campaign, it has been some Sunni Arab minority parties who, in common with rebel groups from the once-dominant Sunni community, have made foreign troop withdrawal a prime demand.

Other politicians, however, know they need US soldiers to stop the Sunni-led insurgency tipping Iraq into civil war, but many of their constituents think the troops make matters worse.

"The occupation forces should withdraw so that we can feel secure. Every day I feel panic when I go to college due to blasts and random shootings," said Israa Mohammad, a 22-year-old student interviewed on the campus of Baghdad University.

That view was reflected in the survey of voters in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Basra, Hilla and Najaf in which more people chose the withdrawal of foreign troops as the priority for next year than chose a more general wish for security.

Animosity toward US, British and

other Coalition soldiers, whom many Iraqis have come to see as contributing to rather than halting violence, underscores Washington's failure to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis 30 months after invading.

It also chimes with growing unpopularity over the war back in the United States.

In the Reuters survey, 59 of the 131 people who indicated a preference said that the withdrawal of foreign troops was the most pressing priority for the next government.

In violence unidentified gunmen killed a parliamentary candidate and an Iraqi police commander in separate attacks yesterday while a bomb that detonated as a police patrol passed through central Baghdad killed three civilians, police said.

100 houses set on fire in Assam

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, DIPHU, Assam

Around 100 houses were set ablaze as ethnic clashes escalated in Karbi Anglong district of Assam, prompting authorities to issue shoot-on-sight orders yesterday.

Armed militants of the outlawed Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) attacked three villages overnight on Saturday and set ablaze homes of Karbi tribesmen in the district, about 320 km east of Guwahati, a day after they threatened to pull out of the ceasefire agreed with the centre in 2003.

District Magistrate GD Tripathi told: "Around 100 houses belonging to Karbi tribes were burnt down, forcing the residents to flee."

Police and paramilitary troops were given shoot-on-sight orders to prevent further attacks.

"Strict orders were issued to the security forces to act on-the-spot," Tripathi said.

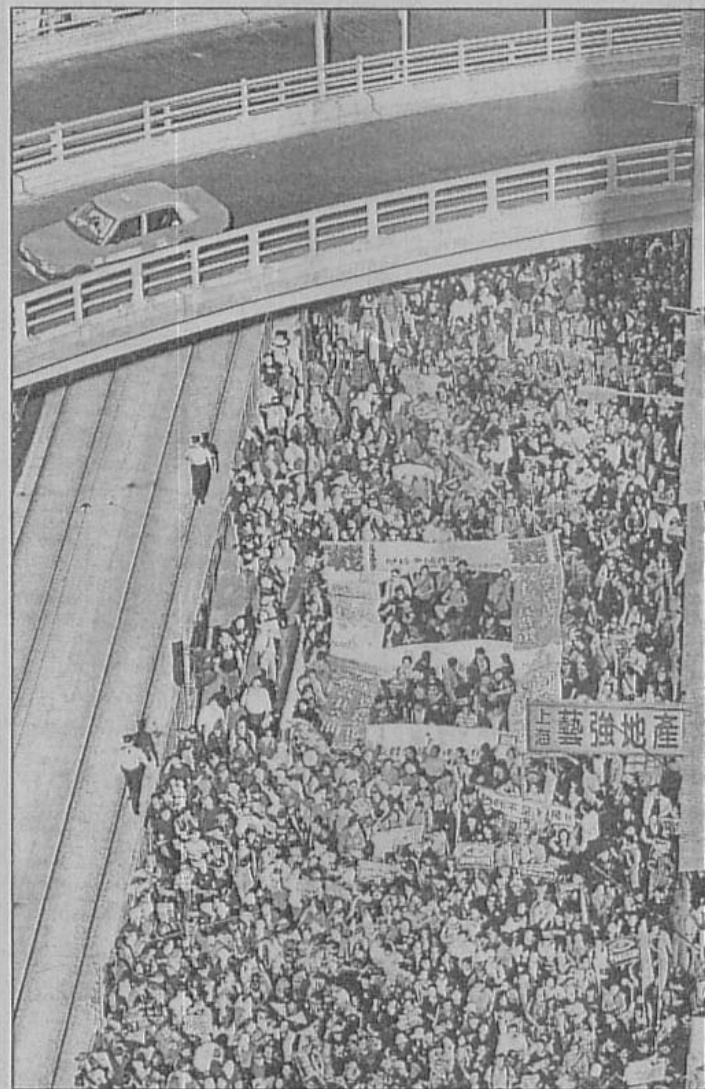
250,000 people march for HK democracy

AFP, Hong Kong

An estimated 250,000 people took to the streets of Hong Kong yesterday, demanding the full democracy that was promised when Britain handed its former colony back to China eight years ago.

Frustrated with the limited reforms proposed by the city's Beijing-appointed leader, Chief Executive Donald Tsang, marchers thronged the streets in the biggest show of public anger since he took office in June.

It was also the largest protest since July 2004 when a half a million protested against Beijing's interference in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory's political affairs.



Tens of thousands of people take part in a pro-democracy march in the streets of Hong Kong yesterday to demand the full democracy that was promised when Britain handed its crown-jewel colony back to China eight years ago.

Plot to rocket Saddam trial uncovered

AP, REUTERS, Baghdad

A Sunni Arab insurgent group was plotting to attack the trial of Saddam Hussein when it resumes today, Iraq's national security adviser said yesterday.

The statement by national security adviser Mouwaffak al-Rubaie's office said the 1920 Revolution Brigades planned to fire rockets at the court building during Monday's session. Iraqi intelligence uncovered the plot, but the statement did not say whether anyone had been arrested.

Saddam and seven co-defendants are on trial for the 1982 killing of more than 140 Shia Muslims in the town of Dujaal following an assassination attempt against him there. The defendants

face the death penalty if convicted. Saddam Hussein has appeared in court for barely six hours so far, but doubts are already being raised about whether his trial is achieving its goals and if there will be enough evidence to convict him.

After two years of planning, some fear the trial, which reconvenes on Monday, could become a drawn out public relations battle, with no guarantees that the tribunal and its US backers will come out on top in the court of public opinion.

"Saddam Hussein needs a trial which is just and fair, open and transparent," Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari told France's Le Figaro newspaper last week. "It is imperative that the trial doesn't become a public relations exercise."

Israel pounds Gaza with artillery fire

AFP, Gaza City

Palestinian militants carried out more cross-border rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip yesterday after Israel launched a series of air raids and pounded the territory with artillery fire.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of the ruling Fatah faction, said it had fired two missiles at dawn into southern Israel in response to the killing of two Palestinians on Saturday, one of the most violent days in Gaza since Israel pulled its troops out of the territory in September.

While the new attacks did not cause any casualties, they looked set to prompt more retaliation from Israel after its defence minister, Shaul Mofaz, pledged to match fire with fire. Israeli aircraft carried out four raids on Gaza overnight, concentrating on an area from where makeshift rockets had been fired into Israel on Saturday, without causing casualties.

"One of these attacks targeted an office organizing terrorist activities and three others targeted a sector in the north of the region from where Qassam rockets have been fired at Israel," the Israeli army spokeswoman told AFP.

CAREER OPPORTUNITY

The Embassy of the United States is looking for an Administrative Clerk for its Security Office. The incumbent will compile data from multiple sources, input into proper reporting format and develop necessary reports from the database. S/he will also provide administrative support for the office.

QUALIFICATION REQUIRED :

- ◆ A Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognized university.
- ◆ Good working knowledge of spoken/written English & Bangla at Level III as tested at the Embassy.
- ◆ At least two years of computer related experience with Microsoft Access.
- ◆ Solid working knowledge of MS Access including the ability to create and modify Access templates. Ability to utilize Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Corel Draw, or MGI Photo suite, flatbed and transparency scanning & Dazzle video capture & CD-RW equipment, and other digital photography hardware and software.

Please FAX your application (**Embassy Prescribed Form**) with contact telephone number to the Human Resources Office at **FAX # 9887825** no later than **COB : December 15, 2005.**

Embassy prescribed job application forms are available at the U.S. Embassy Gate 1, Madani Avenue, Baridhara, Dhaka-1212 during office hours. Forms are also available on our website : dhaka.usembassy.gov

Militants clash with Pak troops at Afghan border

AFP, Miranshah

A soldier and a suspected militant were killed yesterday after troops and militants traded fire in a restive Pakistani tribal area near Afghanistan border, the military said yesterday.

"A soldier and a suspect were killed on Sunday in Shakai valley of South Waziristan" some 60 kilometres (37 miles) southwest of Miranshah, Pakistan's military spokesman Major General Shaikat Sultan told AFP.

"The soldiers traded fire with miscreants during a search operation which had been launched after an improvised explosive device exploded in the area," Sultan said.

Local intelligence officials said that a suspected militant had been captured by troops who cordoned off the area after the blast.

In a separate incident, suspected insurgents fired about five rockets at government and paramilitary installations in Mirali, some 25 kilometres east of Miranshah but caused no damage.

Iran developing missile defence system

Tech bought from Russia

AFP, Tehran

Iran, under pressure over its disputed nuclear programme, has been developing a missile defence system and has bought such technology from Russia, the Islamic republic's top national security official told AFP.

"Is this a problem? Do we need permission?" said Ali Larjani, when asked to confirm reports that his country has bought 29 mobile air defence systems from Moscow in a contract worth more than 700 million dollars (600 million euros).

"We have contracts with other countries to buy or sell arms. This is

not the first time we have signed a contract with the Russians. We have done so in the past with Russia and other countries like China," said Larjani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

"This is not the first time we have bought an anti-missile system. We also make them ourselves."

Russia's state news agency ITAR-TASS on Friday quoted an unnamed top Russian defence ministry official as saying the deal involved 29 Tor M-1 mobile systems capable of bringing down both aircraft and missiles.