

Diplomats rush to save Lankan truce

Fresh war fears mount as violence spikes

AFP, Colombo

Diplomats from Sri Lanka's key backers held an emergency meeting with Tiger rebels yesterday amid fears the country could slip back into war after a day of violence that killed 18 people, officials said.

Representatives from the quartet known as "Co-Chairs" held talks with the head of the Tiger political wing, S.P. Thamilselvan, at Kilinochchi, 330km north of here, a rebel official said by telephone.

He had no immediate details of the discussions which came after the Colombo government urged the international community to pressure the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to de-escalate the violence in the troubled northeast.



PHOTO: AP

GQ Magazine photo shows Wafah Dufour, the daughter of Osama bin Laden's half brother, posed for an article of GQ's January edition.

Laden niece poses for GQ magazine

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Her uncle may be the world's most elusive fugitive, but Osama bin Laden's niece is about as conspicuous as she can be in a sexy photo shoot in the January edition of the men's fashion magazine GQ.

Wafah Dufour is an aspiring New York-based musician who told the magazine that her family ties to the al-Qaeda leader suspected of masterminding the September 11, 2001 attacks have prompted death threats and sent her into a bout of depression.

As part of an effort to distance herself from her massive Saudi family, Dufour appears in a sultry GQ photo spread, reclining on satin sheets wrapped in feathers in one picture and posing in a bubble bath wearing nothing but jewellery in a second.

"I was born in the States and I want people to know I'm American, and I want people here to understand that I'm like anyone in New York. For me, it's home," said Dufour, who took her mother's name after the suicide hijacking attacks that destroyed Manhattan's World Trade Centre.

Indonesia braces for potential terror attacks

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian security forces braced yesterday for potential Christmas Eve terror attacks by extremists believed to be intent on marring the holidays in the world's most populous Muslim nation. Police and military were on high alert amid fears that the killing last month of a top terror suspect would spark retaliatory attacks as minority Christians prepared to attend mass and celebrate Christmas.

"We are focusing on preventive measures. It is not impossible for them (extremists) to show up later tonight. Therefore, we must not be complacent," Jakarta police chief Major General Firman Gani told EShinta radio.

National deputy police spokesman Anton Bahrul Alam said bomb squads nationwide were inspecting places where crowds typically converge.

"Together with the military, the Indonesian police are conducting inspections on suspicious materials in all potentially dangerous areas, such as shopping malls, offices, foreign missions and churches," he told AFP.

A police bomb squad scoured Jakarta's main cathedral, where East Timorese President Xanana Gusmao was expected to attend mass later in the evening, according to a government official.

Jakarta police deployed about 50 men in six anti-bomb units to search for explosives in major churches across Jakarta and its West Java suburb of Bekasi, said Dwi Suseno, the deputy chief of the city's bomb squad unit.

"We are only conducting searches at major churches but we will do the same operation at smaller churches if they ask us to scour the premises," he said.

PHOTO: AFP

A policeman stands guard in front of the Cathedral ahead of Christmas Eve in Jakarta yesterday. Indonesian security forces braced for potential Christmas Eve terror attacks by extremists believed to be intent on marring the holidays in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramayake told diplomats from the Co-Chairs -- the United States, European Union, Japan and Norway -- that the international community must take "specific measures" to prevent the Tigers from unleashing violence.

At least 15 sailors were killed and an equal number wounded in an attack Friday by suspected Tamil Tigers on a naval road convoy while three more people were killed in violence linked to the conflict, officials said.

The pro-rebel TamilNet.com web site said the navy had carried out reprisals against civilians in the area where Friday's ambush took place and had beaten 28 civilians. Fifteen of them had to be hospitalised,

TamilNet said.

The head of the Scandinavian truce monitoring mission, Hagrup Haukland, in a statement said unidentified elements in the island's northeast did not want peace and were carrying out provocative attacks.

He described the attack on the navy road convoy as "vicious" and "cowardly".

The ambush was the worst attack against government forces since the truce arranged by peace broker Norway went into effect from February 23, 2002.

There was no immediate word from the guerrillas to charges that they staged the attack in the northwestern coastal region of Mannar, but the official Tiger website said the

military demonstrated a "knee-jerk" reaction.

"The Sri Lankan army has been taking knee-jerk aggressive military actions in dealing with recent incidents in the northern peninsula of Jaffna and Mannar," the LTTE said in a statement.

People of both areas are expressing fear that the Sri Lankan army continues to be a threatening presence."

Military officials here said security had been stepped up across the island following the spike in rebel attacks that left at least 60 people dead this month alone.

It was also the bloodiest month for the military which has lost 18 sailors, 19 soldiers and two constables during the same period.

UN asks Nepali rebels to explain polls threat

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A top United Nations human rights envoy has asked Nepal's Maoist rebels to explain their threat of "special action" to destroy February municipal polls.

The guerrillas threatened officials and candidates contesting the Feb. 8 elections to 58 municipal assemblies and called for a strike to wreck a vote the government says could lead to parliamentary elections.

The Maoists, fighting to topple the Hindu monarchy in the Himalayan kingdom, have not explained their threat but are known for beating, kidnapping or killing people who disobey them.

"It includes threats to the life or physical integrity of individuals taking no active part in hostilities, or

the taking of hostages, such action would be a grave violation of international human rights standards," said Ian Martin, chief of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal.

"I must ask for a clear undertaking that no such action will be ordered or encouraged," he said in a statement late on Friday.

Municipal elections have been delayed since 2003 because of the Maoist revolt that has killed more than 12,500 people.

Nepal's seven main parties have also pledged to launch protests to thwart the polls, saying they were aimed at legitimising the regime of King Gyanendra, who seized absolute power on Feb. 1, fired the Times in the report late Friday, citing unidentified current and former government officials.

The story did not name the companies.

Since the Times disclosed the domestic spying programme last week, President Bush has stressed that his executive order allowing the eavesdropping was limited to people with known links to al-Qaeda.

'NSA spying broader than Bush admitted'

AP, New York

The National Security Agency has conducted much broader surveillance of e-mails and phone calls without court orders than the Bush administration has acknowledged, The New York Times reported on its website.

The NSA, with help from American telecommunications companies, obtained access to streams of domestic and international communications, said the Times in the report late Friday, citing unidentified current and former government officials.

The story did not name the companies.

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According to preliminary election results, the religious Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), which dominated the outgoing parliament, will also control the next parliament. Final results are not expected before January.

The alliance won overwhelming majorities in the country's southern provinces as well as the key province of Baghdad, while Allawi's secular Shia list performed poorly. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the spiritual leader for many among the nation's Shia majority, appealed for calm and urged the setting up of a government of national unity, national security advisor Muwaffaq al-Rubaie said after meeting with him.

Sistani said Shia-based religious parties should "work with other components of the Iraqi people to set up a government of national unity representative of all the country's main (political) families," related Rubaie.

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