

Tigers warn of bloodbath

3 soldiers among 7 people killed in fighting

AP, AFP, Colombo

The Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday warned of a "bloodbath" if the international community fails to stop the Sri Lankan military's offensive into rebel-held areas.

The warning was the strongest since the two sides signed a ceasefire five years ago and came during a meeting between Norwegian ambassador Hans Brattskar and SP Thamil Selvan, the Tamil rebel political chief, the rebels said in an emailed statement.

Accusing the military of amassing weapons and fighters, Thamil Selvan told Brattskar that the Tamil Tigers also were ready for combat.

"Thamil Selvan said he emphasized to the ambassador that the present soft approach of the interna-

tional community toward the GoSL (Sri Lankan government) is not going to change its plans and will only contribute to a worsening situation leading to bloodbath in the island," the rebels' statement said.

The statement went on to accuse the government of making movements of personnel and equipment closer to the rebels' territory and stated that the rebels were expecting a large-scale attack against them soon.

No comment was immediately available from the Sri Lankan government, whose military in the past five months has driven rebels from many of their bases, mainly in eastern Sri Lanka.

Hours before the rebel warning, the insurgents killed three Sri Lankan soldiers in the island's north

early Monday.

The rebels attacked a military camp in the northern Jaffna peninsula just after midnight, and the ensuing battle lasted for an hour, said Lt. Col. Upali Rajapakse, a senior official at the information unit of the Ministry of Defence.

Seven people have been killed in Sri Lanka's restive northern and eastern regions in clashes between security forces and Tamil Tiger rebels, the defence ministry said Monday.

Three soldiers were killed in the northern district of Jaffna early Monday when troops traded fire with Tiger rebels, the military said, adding that security forces had also inflicted heavy damage on the guerrillas. It gave no further details.

In the eastern district of Ampara,

a police commando was killed on Sunday when forces encountered a rebel group during a foot patrol.

Meanwhile, police said late Sunday they had found the bodies of two civilians shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the eastern district of Batticaloa.

Elsewhere in the north, police found the body of a Tamil youth who had been shot dead tied to a lamp post.

There was no immediate word from the Tamil Tigers.

Escalating violence in the past year has all but destroyed a Norway-brokered 2002 cease-fire agreement. European peace monitors say the fighting has killed at least 4,000 civilians and combatants since December 2005.



PHOTO: AFP

Family members of slain Indian politician Sunil Mahto grieve after seeing his body in the mortuary of the Tata Main Hospital in Jamshedpur yesterday after the death of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Liberation Front) politician.



PHOTO: AFP

US chairman of the Council of Foreign Relations Peter Peterson (L) gestures as he holds talks with Indian Minister for External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee (L) and other officials in New Delhi yesterday.

China slams talk of Taiwan's independence

REUTERS, Beijing/Taipei

China slammed Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's intensified talk of independence yesterday, saying anyone who sought a split from China would be a "criminal in history."

Chen said on Sunday the self-ruled island should pursue independence and change its official title, the "Republic of China" -- moves that are also certain to worry its key ally, the United States, which seeks to maintain the status quo between the two sides.

"Don't listen to local leaders," Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing told Taiwan reporters in Beijing,

Nato airstrike kills 9 in Afghanistan

AP, Kabul

A Nato airstrike hit a house during a firefight between Western troops and militants, killing nine Afghans who lived there, Afghan officials said yesterday.

Militants overnight fired on a Nato base in Kapisa province, just north of Kabul, said Deputy Governor Sayad Mohammad Dawood Hashimmi. When soldiers returned fire, they hit a home, killing five women, three boys and a man, he said.

A deputy Interior Ministry spokesman also said nine civilians had been killed. He asked not to be

identified because the ministry hadn't yet prepared a statement.

Maj. William Mitchell, a US military spokesman, said officials were looking into the incident. The Nato base in Kapisa is staffed by US forces.

The news of the airstrike came one day after wounded Afghans and witnesses said US Marines fired on civilian cars and pedestrians after a frenzied escape from a suicide bomb and gunfire attack in eastern Afghanistan. The violence sparked angry anti-US demonstrations by hundreds of Afghan men.

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