

Tamil rebels launch second air attack

6 soldiers killed in raid, 5 Lankans die in bus bombing

AP, Colombo

Tamil rebel planes bombed government positions yesterday in northern Sri Lanka in their second-ever airstrike. The military said six soldiers were killed but that the aircraft were turned back before reaching a key base.

The attack came amid rising fears that the government may be preparing a major assault on rebels in the north, and followed a bomb blast Monday aboard a bus that killed five passengers and wounded 35 near the frontier between government- and rebel-controlled areas.

The Tamil Tiger rebels said two airplanes carried out Tuesday's air attack on the government's Palaly military base in Jaffna peninsula, and that main armoury and storage facilities were struck.

Lt Col Upali Rajapakse, a senior

military official, said only one light aircraft was involved in the attack and that troops opened fire on it, forcing it to turn back before it reached the Palay base. But the plane dropped two bombs on nearby bunkers while rebels shelled the area.

Six soldiers were killed by the airstrike and shelling, Rajapakse said.

"Our pilots have confirmed that they hit the main armoury and storage facilities in Palaly. Pilots have seen fire," Tiger spokesman Rasiah Ilanthirayan said by telephone from the rebel stronghold of Kilinochchi. "It may have caused damage to their command chain located within the base."

Palaly is a strategic military base with an air strip and functions as the headquarters for military operations against Tiger guerrillas in the north. It is also the supply base for

tens of thousands of soldiers stationed in the ethnic Tamil-majority Jaffna peninsula.

It was the second rebel airstrike since the Tigers started their campaign for a homeland for the country's Tamil minority in 1983. The first was launched last month, when at least one rebel propeller plane bombed a Sri Lankan air force base outside the capital, Colombo, killing three airmen and wounding 16.

On Monday, Sri Lankan officials ordered Norway's ambassador, who is trying to mediate a resumption of peace negotiations, to cancel a trip to the Tamil Tiger rebels' northern strongholds for security reasons, leading to speculation that a major government assault may be planned.

Earlier Monday, the government's air force bombed a rebel sea

FORESTLAND LEASING Forest official contradicts DC's claim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The divisional forest officer (DFO) of Cox's Bazar yesterday contradicted with a statement of the deputy commissioner of the district, which had been published with a news report in The Daily Star on April 17.

In a statement, the DFO said the deputy commissioner gave false information about leasing of a forestland for a housing project mentioned in the news headlined 'Hill Demolished to Create Officials' Housing Plots'.

"The forest department never applied for leasing the forestland at Kolatoli," he said.

"If any individual of the forest department applied for such a lease, that is his personal matter," said the statement adding, "Neither any such initiative was taken

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Four to die, 7 get life term in murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Chittagong Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal yesterday sentenced four people to death and seven others to life imprisonment in businessman GM Ismail murder case.

The tribunal of Judge AHM Mostaque Ahmad handed down capital punishment to Shamim Uddin, Daulat, Mahbub Alam alias Chhota Mahbub and Tauhidul Alam for killing GM Ismail in Fatikchhari in 2003.

Selim, Daulat alias Kala Daulat, Nezam Uddin, Nasiruddin, Abu Taher, Ayub and Nazimuddin were sentenced to life imprisonment. The tribunal also fined them Tk 30,000 each. The court acquitted late Nurul Alam alias Ballaya of the murder charge.

Of the convicts, only Shamim Uddin—the linchpin of the infamous Shamim Bahini—is behind bars while the rest are absconding.

According to the deposition of the case, Shamim, a listed criminal, along with his cohorts around 10:30am on March 18, 2003

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PHOTO: STAR

CNG-run three-wheelers queue up at a filling station on Sonargaon Road in the capital yesterday as frequent power cuts delay servicing.

Plan to engage pvt firms for Ctg port goods handling

RAFIQ HASAN

The government plans to appoint private firms for ship handling at Chittagong port in a bid to expedite the current pace of goods loading and unloading.

The Chittagong Port authority (CPA) has sent a proposal recently to the shipping ministry, which has already forwarded it to the law ministry for vetting, sources said.

The law ministry has sought opinions from senior lawyers in this connection, sources added.

The companies would be selected through a competitive process for working on contract

basis.

The CPA proposal also includes dissolution of Dockworkers' Management Board and appointment of private companies for maintenance of port's equipment.

The CPA would float open tenders inviting proposals from private companies after getting approval from the ministry.

At present, about 54 stevedoring agencies are engaged in goods loading and unloading at 15 berths at the general yard, which costs the CPATk 100 crore a year.

The stevedoring system has already been cancelled at the Chittagong Container Terminal

(CCT) where loading and unloading are currently done by quay gantry cranes.

The entire container handling operation at the CCT has recently been given to a private company, Saif Powertec Limited, on test basis.

The government is also planning to expand space of the port yard to ensure keeping more containers.

Sometimes, about 18,000-20,000 TEUs (twenty equivalent units) containers are crammed at the port, which has a capacity of around 15,000 TEUs.

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3 killed in roof collapse at CNG station

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three workers were killed and three others injured yesterday when a roof of an under-construction CNG filling station collapsed at Moulvi Pukurpar of Chandgaon thana in the city.

One of the three dead was identified as Moharram Ali, 35, from Natore. Identity of the other two could not be ascertained.

Police and witnesses said the incident occurred at around 1:00pm when the roof of the filling station with over 40 construction workers on it collapsed suddenly with a loud bang and buried the three under rubble of bricks and other heavy construction materials.

Fire service and police with the

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Production at Zia fertiliser factory stalled

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

Urea production at Zia Fertilizer Company Limited remained suspended since Monday evening due to a leak in the factory's ammonia plant.

Factory engineers and technicians are trying to repair the leak and hoped to resume production within a day or two, sources said.

This is for the third time in the last 20 days production has been stopped in the factory located at Ashuganj.

Sources said urea production remained suspended for 76 days since July 10 last year, for which the factory failed to produce at least 106,400 metric tonnes of urea.

Hamas declares end to truce with Israel

AP, Gaza City

Hamas militants fired a barrage of rockets and mortar shells toward Israel yesterday and said they considered a five-month truce with Israel to have come to an end.

Tuesday's attack, which came on Israel's 59th independence day, did not cause damage or injury. However, it marked the first time Hamas openly acknowledged firing shells toward Israel since it agreed to a ceasefire along the Gaza-Israel border in November.

A spokesman for Hamas' armed wing said the group considered the truce to have come to an end. "The cease-fire has been over for a long time, and Israel is responsible for that," the spokesman, Abu Obeida, told the Voice of Palestine radio station.

In recent months, Hamas had largely held back on attacks, particularly during its negotiations on a power-sharing agreement with the Fatah movement of moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Now the Muslim militant group appeared to be spoiling for a fight, especially in the absence of any progress toward the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli soldier Cpl Gilad Shalit.

Shalit was captured by Hamas-allied militants in Gaza last June.

"This is a message to the Zionist enemy that our strikes will continue," Abu Obeida said of the rocket fire. "We are ready to kidnap more and more, and kill more and more of your soldiers."

Shalit's kidnappers demand the release of hundreds of Palestinian

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9 US troops killed in Iraq car bomb

48 Iraqis die in 7 other blasts

AGENCIES, Baghdad

In one of the deadliest attacks on American ground forces since the Iraq war started more than four years ago, a suicide car bomber struck a patrol base northeast of Baghdad and killed nine US soldiers and wounded 20, officials said.

An Iraqi civilian also was wounded in the attack on Task Force Lightning soldiers in Diyala province, a volatile area that has been the site of fierce fighting involving US and Iraqi troops, Sunni insurgents and Shia militias.

At least 48 Iraqis were killed in

seven other bombings, violence that has persisted despite a nearly 10-week-old US-Iraqi security crackdown aimed at pacifying Baghdad.

Of the 20 wounded in the attack on the patrol base, 15 soldiers were treated and returned to duty while five others and the Iraqi were evacuated to a medical facility for further care, the military said.

A coalition of Sunni insurgent groups led by al-Qaeda's Iraq branch claimed responsibility in an Internet statement Tuesday for a suicide bombing which killed nine US soldiers north of Baghdad.

"Two knights from the martyr-

dom-seeking brigade of the Islamic State of Iraq plunged their booby-trapped trucks Monday into the US crusader outpost in... Diyala," said the statement by the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq.

It was the second bold attack against a US base north of Baghdad in just over two months and was notable for its use of a suicide car bomber. Militants have mostly used hit-and-run ambushes, roadside bombs or mortars on US troops and stayed away from direct assaults on fortified military compounds to avoid US firepower.

On Feb 19, insurgents struck a

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PHOTO: STAR

Torn and dirty two-taka notes collected from people probably on less payment, and threaded by a person at Gulistan in the capital yesterday.

Indian police kill 2 Ulfa men

AFP, Guwahati

Police in India's northeastern state of Assam said yesterday they had shot dead three separatist rebels and averted potential attacks on the main city of Guwahati.

City police chief S.N. Singh told AFP the three were shot dead when anti-insurgency commandos swooped down on a suspected hideout of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) on the outskirts of Guwahati.

"The militants fired at the police team and in the ensuing encounter three Ulfa rebels were killed," Singh said, adding a pistol, a grenade, two bombs and other explosives were recovered from the dead militants.

"It was a major breakthrough as the ULFA rebels were in all probability planning some attacks in the city," he said.

Ethiopian rebels kill 74 in oil field attack

AP, Addis Ababa

Rebels stormed a Chinese-run oil field near the Somali border yesterday, killing 65 Ethiopians and nine Chinese workers in the dawn raid.

The Ogaden National Liberation Front, an ethnic Somali group that has fought alongside insurgents in Somalia, also kidnapped seven Chinese workers, said Bereket Simon, an adviser to the Ethiopian prime minister.

"This was a cold blooded killing," Bereket told The Associated Press. "This was organized."

In a statement sent to the AP, the rebel group said it had launched "military operations against units of the Ethiopian armed forces guarding an oil exploration site," in the east of the country. It also warned international oil companies not to operate in the region. Without offering details, the statement said rebels "wiped out" three

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Prayer Timing		
April 25		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		