

Bus bombing kills 16 in Lanka

Colombo fears more attacks on civilians

AFP, Colombo

Lanka warned of more Tamil Tiger attacks against civilians yesterday, a day after the guerrillas were accused of setting off a road side bomb blast that killed 16 bus passengers.

Media Minister Anura Yapa said Wednesday night's bombing of a crowded civilian bus in the north-central region of the island was the work of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"We believe that the LTTE is a desperate organisation and will try this type of ruthless attacks against civilians," the minister told reporters here. "We, the government, condemn this and the government

will take appropriate action to protect the people."

One more wounded passenger died of his injuries at the Anuradhapura hospital Thursday, raising the death toll to 16, police said.

Meanwhile, the military and the Tiger rebels were locked in combat across the island's northern region where the military said 14 more Tigers had been killed since Wednesday afternoon.

However, the Tigers said they lost only one fighter and claimed killing 10 government soldiers. There is no independent verification of battle field casualties and both sides are known to offer wildly contradictory figures.

Yapa said the guerrillas had

begun targeting civilians as security forces stepped up pressure on the LTTE's mini-state in the north of the island after dismantling their bases in the island's east earlier this year.

"Why they are targeting civilians is because they are weak and desperate. We are trying our level best to destroy these terrorists in their own places," the minister said.

There was no immediate comment from the Tigers, who were blamed for a similar bombing in the same area in June last year when 64 bus passengers were killed.

That attack followed an air strike in rebel-held territory where the guerrillas said over 60 children were killed.

Yapa said the guerrillas had

US to India Progress on nuke deal whenever Delhi ready

PTI, Washington

The US on Thursday said it will move forward on the civilian nuclear deal whenever India is ready as it "understands" that New Delhi needs to work through the political process in the country.

"In terms of the decisions within the Indian political system, we (the US) respect the needs and the rights of their political leaders to work this through themselves. But we're ready and able to move forward whenever they (India) would like us to," State Department Deputy Spokesman Tom Casey said.

He, however, said that regardless of the outcome or the timing of the agreement, Washington will continue to expand its relations with India, which is "an increasingly important player on the world stage".



Pak court gives bail to Sharif's brother

AFP, Lahore

A Pakistani court yesterday granted bail to the brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in a nine-year-old murder case, his lawyer said.

Shahbaz Sharif, president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and former chief minister of Punjab province, surrendered himself before the court and requested bail, which was granted, lawyer Khawaja Mohammad Haris told AFP.

"The court granted pre-arrest interim bail to my client till December 8 after I requested that he could not follow the legal proceedings because he was living abroad and had not violated any law," Haris said.

Last week, Pakistan election authorities rejected Shahbaz's candidacy on the same charge and for another bank loan default case.

Pak police stop Sharif meeting ousted judge

AFP, Islamabad

Riot police Thursday blocked former premier Nawaz Sharif from meeting Pakistan's deposed chief justice, who is under effective house arrest for refusing to endorse emergency rule, witnesses said.

Opposition leader Sharif was turned back by around 300 police men manning concrete and barbed wire barricades near the Islamabad residence of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, an AFP reporter saw.

Hundreds of Sharif's supporters chanted "Long live Nawaz Sharif" after their leader was turned back and burned a large poster of President Pervez Musharraf, who imposed a state of emergency on November 3.

"I have come here to express

'US military still far from any victory dance in Iraq'

AFP, Baghdad

The top American general in Iraq, David Petraeus, expressed satisfaction on Thursday at the progress made in Iraq but said the military was still far from any victory dance.

"Nobody in uniform is doing victory dances in the end zone," Petraeus told reporters travelling with US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, who arrived in Baghdad Wednesday on an unannounced visit.

Gates said on Wednesday that the violence in Iraq had dropped to levels not seen since the bombing

of a Shia shrine in the central town of Samarra that unleashed brutal Shia and Sunni conflict nearly two years ago.

He said the reduction in violence meant the "goal of a secure, stable and democratic Iraq is within reach."

Petraeus, who in September announced to Congress the first possible elements of an American troop drawdown in Iraq, was more cautious on Thursday.

"We work hard to build up on the progress made" but "we have to be careful not to feel too successful," he said.

Pak troops retake key towns from pro-Taliban cleric

AFP, Peshawar

Troops retook two key towns from disciples of a pro-Taliban cleric in northwest Pakistan and freed dozens of people from a rebel jail set up in a girls' school, officials said yesterday.

The gains reported by the government in the troubled Swat Valley are the latest since President Pervez Musharraf ordered an operation to clear the scenic tourist area of Islamist militants.

Operations in the mountain area during the past two weeks have killed nearly 250 militants as well as around 15 soldiers and 30 civilians, the army and local officials say.

Judge denies access to top Guantanamo suspect

AP, Guantanamo Bay Naval Base

A military judge rejected a request Wednesday by lawyers for a Guantanamo detainee to talk to the alleged mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, thwarting their attempt to show the defendant was a minor al-Qaeda figure.

Civilian defence attorney Harry Schneider told reporters he had hoped that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the two other high-value detainees held at this isolated US military base could establish that their client Salim Ahmed Hamdan, a former driver for Osama bin Laden, was not a hardcore terrorist.

Police, politicians, judges most corrupt: TI

AFP, Berlin

"And they do not see enough commitment when they look to their governments and leaders."

The

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Nepali peace process 'lost momentum': EU PM wants polls by April

AFP, Kathmandu/ Tokyo

year ago.

"The peace process has lost its momentum. The EU, a long-term friend of Nepal, wants key elections to be held by April after a delay caused by a deadlock with former Maoist rebels on abolishing the monarchy, a report said yesterday.

Elections, a crucial element of last year's peace deal that ended a decade-long civil war, were to be held on November 22 to select a "constituent assembly" to rewrite the constitution and decide the fate of the monarchy.

A peace process in Nepal aimed at bringing Maoist insurgents into the political mainstream and ending a decade of civil war has "lost momentum", the European Union special representative Pedro Moitinho de Almeida told reporters yesterday.

A senior EU diplomat urged political parties to "remove the obstacles to early elections" following months of wrangling between the ex-rebels and mainstream parties who signed up for peace a

and the monarchy abolished. Meanwhile, Nepal's prime minister wants key elections to be held by April after a delay caused by a deadlock with former Maoist rebels on abolishing the monarchy, a report said yesterday.

The impoverished Himalayan nation has twice been scheduled to hold elections on its political future, but these polls have been postponed due to Maoist demands that the electoral system be reformed

China mine blast kills 70 26 others trapped

AFP, Beijing

At least 70 people were killed and 26 others trapped after an explosion at a coal mine in northern China Thursday, with the tragedy magnified by chaotic rescue work.

The gas blast occurred just after midnight at a mine in Linfen city, a coal-rich area in Shanxi province, the State Administration of Mine Safety said, in the latest tragedy to hit China's notoriously unsafe mining industry.

By late Thursday evening, 70 bodies had been retrieved and at least 26 other workers remained trapped in the mine shaft, the government-run Xinhua news agency said, citing local rescue headquarters.

Five people had either been rescued or managed to escape themselves, Xinhua reported.

The mine safety administration had earlier in the day reported that at least 40 people had been killed and 74 had been trapped at the Ruizhongyu mine.

A spokeswoman for the administration, An Yuanjie, told AFP that some of the people trapped or killed were rescue workers who had rushed into the mine, despite concerns that the gas build-up in the shaft remained dangerously high.

"After the accident occurred, the mine sent in a rescue team of 32 people, but soon after they were trapped as well," she said. It was not clear on Thursday evening how many of the dead or trapped were

Karadzic, Mladic evade capture in Balkans

AFP, Belgrade

International forces in Bosnia staged a raid Thursday in the hunt for genocide suspect Radovan Karadzic, as a Serbian prosecutor said his main war crimes accomplice remained elusive.

In a pre-dawn operation, troops from the European Union and Nato searched the home of an associate of former Bosnian Serb political leader Karadzic, who along with his former military chief Ratko Mladic is one of the most wanted men in Europe.

Documents and a small quantity of ammunition were seized in a five-hour search of premises in the eastern town of Sokolac owned by Mile Savicic, a former driver and bodyguard for Karadzic, said the European Union's peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.

An Indian Hindu nationalist leader accused of failing to stop deadly 2002 religious riots has sparked fresh controversy by saying an innocent Muslim man killed by police "got what he deserved."

Narendra Modi, who is campaigning for re-election this month in India's western Gujarat state, made the remark Tuesday at a rally of his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Gujarat's anti-terrorist squad gunned down Sohrabuddin Sheikh in 2005 outside the main city of Ahmedabad, claiming he planned to assassinate Modi. Police also killed Sheikh's wife, who witnessed her husband's death.

After the dead man's brother insisted Sheikh was innocent, the state government admitted the killing was a "false encounter"—or the deliberate killing of an innocent