

Lanka's warring parties lock in fierce fighting

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's troops and Tamil rebels were locked in fierce fighting yesterday in the island's north, the two sides said as the top military chief vowed to kill 3,000 guerrillas by June.

Both the military and the Tiger guerrillas claimed to have inflicted heavy losses against the other in the latest weekend fighting along the de facto border separating the mini-state run by the Tigers.

The defence ministry said troops killed at least 33 members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and wounded another 38 in the latest battles in the district of Mannar.

The ministry placed its own losses at six soldiers wounded, but the Tigers said they killed at least 20 government soldiers and wounded another 40. The rebels placed their own losses at three guerrillas killed.

"The Sri Lanka armed forces fighting units are already beaten back in two of the three fronts,"

Tiger spokesman Rasiah Ilanthiriyar said in a statement.

"Both sides use heavy artillery, multi-barrel rocket launchers and small mortars to provide tactical support fire to respective troops. The shelling duel and firefights still continue in those areas," the statement said.

Both sides regularly make sharply differing claims about casualties and independent verification is rarely possible. Journalists are not allowed into rebel-held areas in the north.

The state-run Sunday Observer reported that the military planned to "eliminate" the separatist Tamil Tigers in the next six months with stepped up military action in the New Year.

"There are around 3,000 LTTE terrorists remaining and the military targets to annihilate them within the first six months of the next year," the newspaper quoted army chief Sarath Fonseka as saying.

Earlier Sri Lanka's defence

secretary said the government should formally pull out of a ceasefire with Tamil Tiger rebels amid escalating fighting in the island, a state-run daily reported Saturday.

A 2002 Norwegian-brokered truce began to unravel in December 2005 and both sides have blamed each other for the mounting violence, which has claimed over 6,000 lives since then, according to government figures.

"The ceasefire agreement exists only on paper. Obviously we can see there is no ceasefire," Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, who is President Mahinda Rajapakse's younger brother, told the Daily News.

"It has become a joke," the defence secretary said.

Sri Lanka is pressing for a military victory over the rebels, fighting for a separate state for the ethnic Tamil minority in the Sinhalese-majority nation. Tens of thousands have died on both sides since the conflict erupted in 1972.

Hundreds in shelter after religious unrest in India

AFP, Bhubaneswar

Nearly 500 Hindus and Christians were being housed in relief centres after clashes between the communities left at least five dead since Christmas, a government official said yesterday.

Nearly a dozen churches were damaged and a man killed on Christmas night in eastern Orissa state during a protest backed by a right-wing Hindu group.

Subsequent clashes between Hindus and Christians left four more dead.

"We have around 500 people, both Christians and Hindus, in our four major shelter camps. They will return to their homes soon," senior administrative official Suresh Mohapatra told AFP.

He said some 30 people had been arrested as a curfew stayed in place for a fifth straight day Sunday in four towns in Kandhamal district, 300km southwest of the state capital Bhubaneswar.

Two police officials were suspended and others transferred.



Members of The Global Council of Indian Christians hold placards and crosses as they take part in a protest in front of the Orissa Secretariat in Bhubaneswar yesterday. Nearly 500 Hindus and Christians were housed in relief shelters after clashes between the communities left at least five people dead since Christmas Day, a government official said.

'Long live Bhutto' were Benazir's last words

AFP, London

Benazir Bhutto's last words were "Long live Bhutto", the chief political adviser with the former Pakistani prime minister as she was killed told the British newspaper The Sunday Telegraph.

Benazir shouted the words from her car just before she was killed at a campaign rally in the northern city of Rawalpindi on Thursday, said Saffar Abbasi, who said he was sitting behind her in the vehicle.

"She did not say anything more," he recalled, in what the weekly broadsheet said was the first account of Benazir's death from inside her car.

Recounting the incident, Abbasi said: "All of a sudden there was the sound of firing. I heard the sound of a bullet."

"I saw her: she looked as though she ducked in when she heard the firing. We did not realise that she had been hit by a bullet."

He said he looked up to see Benazir sliding back through the sunroof, just before it was rocked by a huge explosion.

India restores train service to Pakistan

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday decided to restore a train service to Pakistan two days after suspending it over security concerns in the wake of violence over Benazir Bhutto's killing, the railways ministry said.

"The situation has improved. So, the government has allowed the services to be resumed," said Anil Saxena, a spokesman for the railways ministry.

The "Samjhauta (friendship) Express" that runs between New Delhi and the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore will leave the Indian capital late Sunday for the border town of Attari from where it would cross the border.

The government was also likely to resume the second train, the Thar Express, named after India's western desert, to leave the city of Jodhpur for the Pakistani town of Khokrapar next week.

More than 400 passengers, mostly Pakistani nationals, were stranded in Jodhpur at the weekend because of the cancellation of the train that runs every Friday, the Press Trust of India reported.

Iran's nuke plant to start in summer of 2008: FM

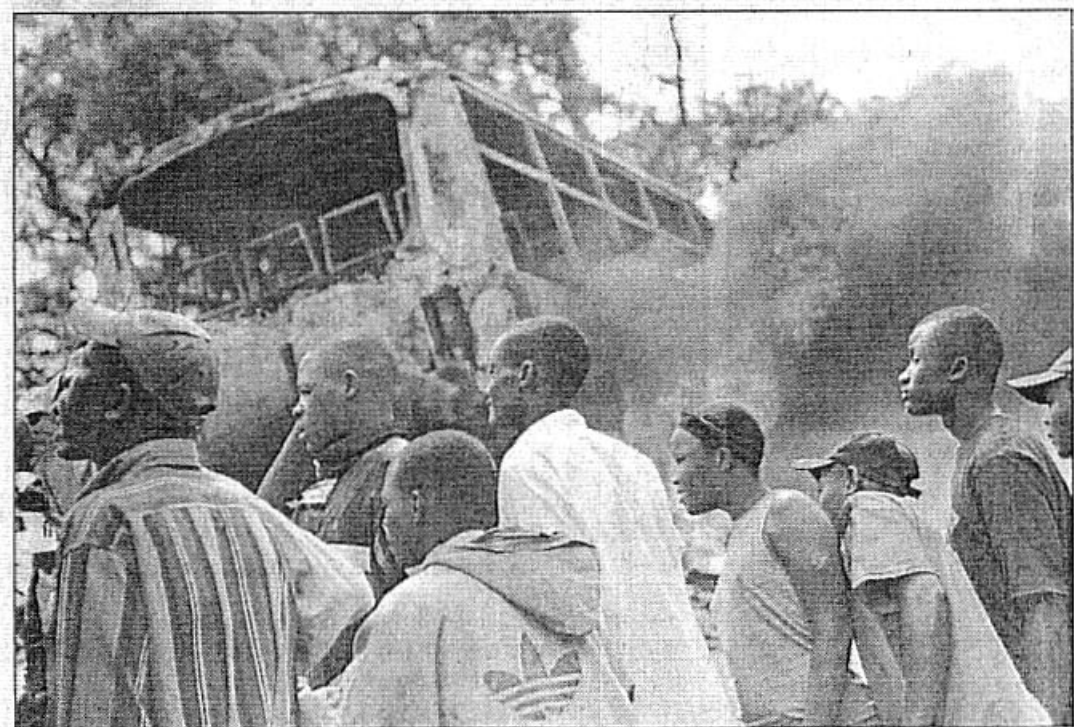
AFP, Tehran

Iran on Sunday insisted its first nuclear power station would be launched in the summer of 2008, despite statements by the plant's Russian constructors it will not go on line until the end of the year.

"The Bushehr nuclear power station will launch at a capacity of 50 percent next summer," said Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, quoted by the state news agency IRNA.

A Russian contractor is finishing the construction of the much-delayed 1,000 megawatt plant in the southern city of Bushehr. Moscow has also agreed to deliver the nuclear fuel required by the facility.

A spokeswoman for the Russian contractor Atomstroexport said earlier this month that it would take at least a year to launch the power station.



Residents of the Mathare slum in Nairobi look at demonstrators protesting down the street past a burning bus in Kenya yesterday. Kenyans expected to find out the winner of the country's tight presidential race, after three days of vote tallying marred by opposition claims of state-engineered rigging and widespread rioting.

Violence in Kenya over election

AP, Nairobi

Kenya's opposition candidate called on President Mwai Kibaki to concede defeat Sunday in the closest presidential race in the country's history, accusing him of fraud after a chaotic vote count sparked widespread violence and fears of rigging.

"This government has lost all legitimacy and cannot govern," Raila Odinga said Sunday, three days after the vote.

Odinga, who led by 38,000 votes, but the electoral commission suspended announcing results Saturday night, promising to look into allegations of fraud.

There was no immediate response from Kibaki. If Kibaki loses, he will be Kenya's first sitting president ousted at the ballot box.

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, chief European Union election monitor for Thursday's election, voiced concerns about the counting process.

Hamas raids Fatah offices in Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Armed men from the Islamist Hamas movement raided the Gaza offices of the rival Fatah movement overnight ahead of a key anniversary of president Mahmoud Abbas's party, officials said yesterday.

Gunmen from the Hamas-run Executive Force broke into Fatah headquarters in Gaza City, confiscating equipment and computers, Fatah officials said. At least two other Fatah offices in the coastal territory were also targeted.

"Armed men from the Hamas movement at dawn raided the headquarters of the Fatah movement... just as they raided several branch offices of the movement in different areas of Gaza," said Ahmed Hellis, a senior Fatah official.

"This behaviour is incomprehensible and follows continuing aggression against the members and institutions of the Fatah move-

ment."

The Executive Force -- a paramilitary group that has policed the Gaza Strip since Hamas violently seized power in June -- also raided Al-Azhar University, the university's president said, arresting dozens of students.

A spokesman for the Executive Force said the students were arrested for "illegal" activities.

The incidents came two days before a key anniversary of the secular Fatah party founded by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. On January 1, 1965 Fatah for the first time declared itself as an armed Palestinian resistance group.

Long a dominant force in Palestinian politics, Fatah was crushed in parliamentary elections in January 2006 by the Islamist Hamas. The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) seized control

of the Gaza Strip in June, routing forces loyal to Fatah after a week of deadly street fighting.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will from now on decide on any new tenders for Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem, a government official said on Sunday.

The move was announced a little over a week before a visit to the region by US President George W. Bush, whose administration has criticised its close ally Israel over settlement activity.

"Last week Prime Minister Olmert had a meeting with Housing Minister Zeev Boim at which it was decided that the prime minister from now on will give the final authorisation for any new construction in the West Bank and east Jerusalem," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

3 pro-Thaksin election winners disqualified: Thai election body

AFP, Bangkok

Three politicians linked to ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra who won seats in Thailand's recent election have been disqualified for vote buying, the Election Commission said yesterday.

The candidates from northeastern Buriram province are members of the pro-Thaksin People Power Party (PPP), which gained the most seats in December 23 elections, the first since a military coup last year.

"They were accused of paying voters," Election Commission (EC) secretary general Suthiphon Thaveechaiyagarn told reporters.

"The commissioners have decided to withdraw those three candidates' election rights for one year, and will organise a re-run of the election," he added.

Suthiphon said the three disqualified candidates will likely face legal action and would have to pay for the by-elections in their province, which authorities have 30

days to organise.

PPP will not be able to field any candidates in the three by-elections, reducing their overall number of parliamentary seats.

Three other PPP lawmakers will have to re-stand for their seats in northeast Nakhon Ratchasima province, after the EC ruled that there was possible electoral fraud, but not enough evidence to disqualify the candidates.

PPP won 233 of the 480 seats up for grabs in Thailand's lower house, just short of the majority needed to govern alone. They are expected to announce details of a coalition government on Friday.

Their win was a blow to the military junta, which had sought to rid Thailand of Thaksin's political influence.

A slate of electoral fraud claims were filed with the EC after the poll, and the commission is still investigating the cases. Consequently more candidates could yet be disqualified, shuffling the balance of power among the parties.

Tokyo, Beijing must work together

Says Japan PM

AFP, Beijing

Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda called for closer cooperation with China yesterday as he wrapped up a four-day visit in which the two sides pledged to build on a recent thaw in relations.

"This trip to China has been very meaningful," Fukuda told reporters after visiting a shrine in eastern China to the ancient philosopher Confucius.

"I have talked with Chinese leaders and agreed that Japan and China can do more if they cooperate than each can do single-handedly."

Fukuda left later on Sunday after a landmark visit during which he held talks with Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao in Beijing on closer cooperation in trade, climate change and other fields, although they failed to close the gap in a stubborn dispute over maritime gas fields.

Fukuda, however, had accentuated

the positive during his trip, his first to China since becoming prime minister in September and the latest step forward in a relationship marred by decades of distrust.

"There's no good thing if Japan and China confront each other," Fukuda said Sunday.

Ties between east Asia's two dominant nations, long coloured by Japan's brutal invasion of China before and during World War II, have improved rapidly.

China cut high-level contacts with Tokyo during the 2001-2006 premiership of Junichiro Koizumi due to his visits to the controversial Yasukuni shrine, which venerates 2.5 million war dead including war criminals who invaded China.

But Koizumi's successor Shinzo Abe, and now Fukuda, have reached out to Beijing to keep diplomatic ties on a par with a deepening trade relationship, partly due to intense lobbying by Japanese industrialists seeking a warmer atmosphere.



Smoke rises from a military garrison after an explosion in the Bombona Battalion of Medellin in Colombia Saturday. The explosion has left at least two dead and seven injured.

Security tight for Saddam execution anniversary

AFP, Baghdad

Security forces were on alert yesterday in the Sunni regions of Iraq where Saddam Hussein drew his most fervent support, as loyalists of the ousted dictator marked the first anniversary of his execution.

Police and troops were patrolling the village of Awja, Saddam's birthplace and where he now lies buried, and in the nearby city of Tikrit in central Iraq, an AFP reporter said.

In Tikrit, where security personnel were ready to monitor any pro-Saddam gatherings, fresh slogans were painted on walls in support of the former president and Sunni leader who was hanged for crimes against humanity.

"We will take revenge for president Saddam Hussein," read one of the slogans.

Iraqi security officials said they were ready to deal with any civil unrest in the heartland areas of Sunni Iraq north and west of Baghdad, from where most of the senior officials in his regime came.

In northern Baghdad's strongly Sunni district of Adhamiyah, posters of Saddam were pasted on to

walls to mark one year since his execution for the killing of around 140 Shias from the village of Dujail after an attempt on his life there in 1982.

Saddam was hanged at the age of 69 in Baghdad just minutes before the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Azha began on December 30 last year.

Sunni Muslims celebrated Eid-ul-Azha this year on December 19, when dozens of Saddam's supporters gathered in Awja to lay flowers on his grave and pay their respects.

During the final minutes of his life, Saddam's executioners taunted him in scenes at the gallows captured on a mobile phone camera, which triggered outrage around the world and embarrassed Iraq's Shia-led government.

Even US President George W. Bush, who hailed Saddam's capture in December 2003 after the March US-led invasion toppled his regime, sharply criticised the manner of his execution.

In a television interview in January he said the hanging resembled a sectarian "revenge killing" and had made it harder to end the violence plaguing Iraq.

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USA	1	7.5	7.5
China	86	7.5	7.5
South Korea	82	7.5	7.5
Thailand	66	7.5	7.5
Brunei	673	7.5	7.5
Bahamas	1-242	7.5	7.5
Bermuda	1441	7.5	7.5
Costa Rica	506	7.5	7.5
Cyprus	357	7.5	7.5
Gabon	241	7.5	7.5
Guam	1-671	7.5	7.5
Macau	853	7.5	7.5
Malawi	265	7.5	7.5
Puerto Rico	1787/1939	7.5	7.5
Saipan	1670	7.5	7.5
San Marino	378	7.5	7.5
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Italy	39	7.5	18
UK	44	7.5	18
Taiwan	886	7.5	18
Switzerland	41	7.5	18
Norway	47	7.5	18
Sweden	46	7.5	18
Belgium	32	7.5	18
Netherlands	31	7.5	18
Luxembourg	352	7.5	18
Ireland	353	7.5	18
Spain	34	7.5	18
Greece	30	7.5	18
Austria	43	7.5	18
Argentina	54	7.5	18
Armenia	374	7.5	18
Czech Republic	420	7.5	18
Finland	358	7.5	18
Japan	81	7.5	18
Laos	856	7.5	18
Mongolia	976	7.5	18
New Zealand	64	7.5	18
Panama	507	7.5	18
Poland	48	7.5	18
Portugal	351	7.5	18
South Africa	27	7.5	18
Togo	228	7.5	18
Turkey	90	7.5	18
Venezuela	58	7.5	18
Zambia	260	7.5	18

শাখা স্থানান্তর

সন্মানিত গ্রাহক, শুভানুধ্যায়ী ও সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের সুবিধার্থে ঢাকা অঞ্চলাধীন অগ্রণী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড, মাতৃহাইল শাখাটি আগামী ০১-০১-০৮ইং তারিখ থেকে পুরাতন ভবন হতে নতুন ভবনে স্থানান্তর করা হবে এবং স্থানান্তরিত নতুন ঠিকানায় শাখার যাবতীয় ব্যাংকিং কার্যক্রম শুরু করা যাচ্ছে।

নতুন ঠিকানা
অগ্রণী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড
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মৌজা- পাড়া উপার
জেলা নং- সারদেব- ৩৩১, হাল- ১৬৩,
সিএস খতিয়ান নং- ৩৩৫, এসএ
খতিয়ান নং- ৪০৭, খারিজা খতিয়ান নং-
৪০৭/১, জোত নং- ৮৮/২০, সিএস ও
এস দাগ নং- ৬০১, হালে খতিয়ান নং-
৩৫২৫, হালে দাগ নং- ৩৫৯৬,
পোঃ- পাড়া উপার, থানা- ডেমরা,
জেলা- ঢাকা।

নতুন ঠিকানা
অগ্রণী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড
মাতৃহাইল শাখা, ঢাকা।

মৌজা- পাড়া উপার
দাগ নং- সিএস ও এসএ- ৩০৮,
আরএস- ৯৫১, খতিয়ান নং- এসএ-
৭৫১, আরএস- ৭০, হোডিং নং- ০৪,
পোঃ- পাড়া উপার, থানা- ডেমরা,
জেলা- ঢাকা।

সন্মানিত গ্রাহক, পৃষ্ঠপোষক ও শুভানুধ্যায়ীদেরকে পুরাতন ঠিকানার পরিবর্তে নতুন ঠিকানায় যোগাযোগ ও ব্যাংকিং কার্যক্রম সম্পন্ন করার জন্য অনুরোধ জানানো যাচ্ছে।

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