

Lanka govt signals end to Norway's peace role

International concern mounts over end of truce

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka signalled yesterday it wanted to end Norway's position as the island's main peace broker as international concern mounted over Colombo's decision to end a truce with Tamil Tiger guerrillas.

The Colombo government, which declared an end to the tattered ceasefire on Wednesday, said it wanted Oslo to have a "redefined role" in the country where more than 60,000 people have been killed in ethnic violence since 1972.

"Now that there are new circumstances, we naturally expect the Norwegians to have a redefined role," Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama told reporters.

"We will tell you what that role is when the (Sri Lankan) government decides."

Norway was instrumental in persuading the government and the Tamil Tigers to sign a truce in

February 2002, and has since then tried but failed to secure progress at successive rounds of negotiations.

Fighting has escalated in recent months, and the government now believes it has the upper hand and is in a position to capture the Tamil Tiger mini-state in the north.

Bogollagama said the Sri Lankan government will press ahead to crush "the scourge of terrorism," while working on a "practical and sustainable political solution."

He also said the truce deal was "flawed from the start," although he stopped short of calling for Nordic diplomats -- frequently accused by Colombo of being sympathetic to the Tamil Tigers -- to go home.

There was no immediate reaction from the Norwegians, but Norway's International Development Minister Erik

Solheim, an architect of the truce deal, has already voiced serious concern over the prospect of more bloodshed.

Sri Lanka's top aid donor Japan also expressed its "deep concern" over the formal end to the truce.

"Our country is deeply concerned that the decision by the Sri Lankan government would not only further stall the peace process but also worsen the conflict," Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura said in a statement.

"Our country strongly hopes that the procedures needed for progress in the peace process will be implemented swiftly."

The United States, which has banned the Tigers since October 1997, asked both Colombo and the rebels not to escalate violence.

"The United States is troubled," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, adding that

"ending the ceasefire agreement will make it more difficult to achieve a lasting, peaceful solution."

Canada's Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier also voiced fears for "civilians, humanitarian workers and human rights defenders."

"Violence will not produce solutions, it will only bring more tragedy to the people of Sri Lanka," he added.

New York-based Human Rights Watch also repeated its call for a UN human rights monitoring mission in Sri Lanka -- something the world body has been pushing for but the Sri Lankan government has rejected.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have not yet formally renounced the truce, although rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran said in November that the peace process was a waste of time.



Winners of Bogra Divisional Math Olympiad 2008 pose for photograph with the guests at the prize giving ceremony at Bogra Zila School yesterday. Dutch-Bangla Bank and Prothom Alo jointly organised the event.

China clamps down on Internet video

AFP, Beijing

China has announced new rules to control the explosion of audio-visual content on the Internet, in a move seen as an effort to transfer the government's television and radio censorship model to the Web.

Only state-controlled entities will have the right to operate websites that post audio-visual material, under the new regulations, which state clearly that all content must adhere to the ruling Communist Party's values.

"Those who provide Internet audio and video services should insist on serving the people, serve socialism... and abide by the moral code of socialism," a government notice said.

All content must be free of violence, sex, or gambling, and cannot reveal state secrets or portray morally, socially or politically harmful situations, according to the notice.

The new rules have thrown into doubt how freely video sharing

websites that have become enormously popular in recent years, such as YouTube and China's Tudou, will be able to operate.

Under the rules, posted on a government website and to take effect from January 31, websites seeking to offer audio-visual services will have to seek a broadcast licence, renewable every three years.

"Those applying for Internet audio-visual service (licences) must at the same time... be solely state-owned enterprises or enterprises whose shares are controlled by the state," the notice said.

The rules led to rare harsh criticism of the government from some sections of the traditional media, which operate under a tough censorship system and where following the government's agenda is normally a must.

The 21st Century Business Herald said the regulations were attempting to place China's draconian rules on television and film broadcasting onto Internet videos and "podcasts." These are

disastrous regulations," the paper said.

The Southern Metropolitan Daily said the regulations would channel industry profits still being developed by small entrepreneurs into the coffers of state-run companies.

"We need industry policies that encourage the historic wave that advances this kind of technology that is bringing prosperity and transforming civilisation," the daily said in an editorial.

"We don't need the one-sided field of vision seen in the days of the planned economy where normal advances and growth are curbed by (the government) suppressing market forces."

Liu Bin, a Beijing-based analyst with media technology consultancy firm BDA China, said the government was concerned over the rising popularity and power of video-sharing and online television.

"Online video websites have become a very influential media

platform, so (the government) feels controls have to be ramped up," Liu told AFP.

As an example of the difference between old and new media, videos of anti-government protests that would never appear on state-run television often find their way on the Internet to be viewed by countless Chinese.

Chinese authorities have also found it extremely tough to eradicate pornography on the Internet, despite massive efforts.

However the critical Chinese press reports and Liu emphasised that it remained unclear exactly how tightly the regulations would be implemented, noting that many other rules are often ignored or circumvented.

Spokesmen for Yahoo China and Google did not want to comment extensively on the new rules.

"There's always new regulations and you adapt to them as necessary," Porter Erisman, Beijing-based spokesman for Yahoo China, told AFP.



BCL leaders place wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday to mark the 60th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL).

Britain urges reconciliation in Myanmar

AFP, London

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband called for national reconciliation in Myanmar in a statement yesterday marking the country's 60th anniversary of independence from Britain.

He urged Myanmar's military rulers to engage in "constructive dialogue" following the junta's bloody clampdown on dissent in September, and stressed that Britain remained keen on "international action".

"Today marks the 60th anniversary of Burma's independence. We congratulate the people of Burma on this historic landmark," Miliband said.

"But for 45 of the last 60 years Burma has been under military rule. The brutal suppression of peaceful demonstrations last autumn was a sad reminder of the extent to which the Burmese people's aspirations for democracy, stability and prosperity have been frustrated. They deserve far better."

"We call once more upon the Burmese regime to embrace the path of constructive dialogue that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has called for. Only through a process of genuine national reconciliation can a better future for the people of Burma be realised."

"The UK remains committed to international action on Burma. We support the efforts of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari and we are working closely with our EU partners to bring pressure for change to bear on the regime."

Scientists pinpoint tumour-suppressing gene: Study

AFP, Paris

Scientists have identified a gene that helps protect mice against intestinal tumours, although it may also play a role in spreading breast cancer, according to a study published Thursday.

Despite the gene's Jekyll-and-Hyde personality, the discovery may one day lead to drugs that boost resistance to cancer in humans, said the study, which

appears in the British journal Nature.

Researchers led by Roger Reeves at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, showed that the gene Ets2 acts as a tumour suppressor in rodents afflicted with the human equivalent of Down's syndrome.

The finding settles a decades-old debate about whether this inherited disorder confers protection against cancerous tumours.

Establishing this connection was, in fact, the starting point for a clever series of experiments using genetically modified mice that eventually led to Ets2.

Down's syndrome, which occurs in approximately one in 800 live births, retards physical and intellectual development. Persons with the syndrome have an extra chromosome in their genetic code -- 47 rather than 46, due to an additional 21st chromosome.

Reeves and his colleagues began by cross-breeding rodents carrying the three copies of chromosome 21 with another set of gene-altered mice designed to develop intestinal cancer.

Compared to normal mice, the offspring produced far fewer tumours, and the cancers that did appear were smaller, the study showed.

Further breeding experiments led to a third mutant mouse which expressed the minimal genetic changes needed to produce Down's syndrome, and this allowed Reeves to narrow down the precious anti-tumour source to a mere 33 genes.

He then created a new mouse variant with only a single copy of these 33 genes and mated it with cancer-producing rodents.

As expected, the resulting offspring showed a significant increase in tumours, which suggests that the gene (or genes) that protect against malignant growths are more effective when there are multiple copies of them.

This explains, Reeves concluded, why individuals with Down's syndrome -- who have an extra copy of the chromosome containing the genes in question -- would have lower rates of cancerous growths.

The final step in the lab detective work was to narrow the tumour-buster down even further.

In the end, only one gene correlated perfectly with the incidence of tumours in the mutant mice -- Ets2.

This surprised the researchers, because increased activity of the Ets2 protein has been previously linked to the spread of breast cancer.

Resolving this paradox, says David Threadgill, a geneticist at the University of South Carolina, will be vital if drugs with Ets2-like action are to be harnessed in the fight against cancer.

World to cool slightly in 2008: Experts

AFP, London

World temperatures will cool slightly in 2008, but it will remain among the top 10 hottest years on record, British weather experts predicted Thursday.

The impact of a strong La Nina climate pattern over the Pacific will help keep temperatures down, according to the annual forecast by the Met Office and the University of East Anglia.

Overall the global temperature is expected to be 0.37 degree Celsius above the long-term average of 14.0 degree, making it the

coolest year since 2000 when the value was 0.24 degree C above the average.

Phenomena such as El Nino and La Nina have a significant influence on global surface temperature and the current strong La Nina will act to limit temperatures in 2008," said Professor Chris Folland of the Met Office.

"However mean temperature is still expected to be significantly warmer than in 2000... Sharply renewed warming is likely once La Nina declines," he added.

The forecasts take into account El Nino and La Nina, ballooning

greenhouse gas levels as well as solar effect and natural variations in the world's oceans.

The cooling comes against the background of an underlying warming trend, said Professor Phil Jones, Director of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia.

"The fact that 2008 is forecast to be cooler than any of the last seven years -- and that 2007 did not break the record warmth set on 1998 -- does not mean that global warming has gone away," he said.

"What matters is the underlying rate of warming -- the period 2001-

2007 with an average of 0.44 degree Celsius above the 1961-90 average was 0.21 degree Celsius warmer than corresponding values for the period 1991-2000."

La Nina, effectively a drop in sea surface temperatures off the western coast of South America, can cause havoc with weather patterns in many parts of the globe.

El Nino, a warming of Pacific sea surface temperatures, was blamed for a lengthy drought in Australia, flooding in the Horn of Africa and Bolivia, and more severe winter monsoons in South Asia in 2006-2007.



Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed, director, Human Resources, Pan Pacific Sonargaon, hands over winter clothes to a 3-member team of Marie Stopes Clinic for the Sidr victims recently. AK Raihan, GM HR, Dr Kazi Golam Rasul, GM, Programme and Resource Development, and Dr Mobarak Hossain, general manager, Services, were also present.



Dhaka Community Hospital with the support of DFID and UNDP distributed relief among the Sidr-affected people at Bagerhat, Patuakhali and Barisal districts recently.

Distant star sheds light on birth of planets

AFP, Paris

Astronomers poring over a young star 180 light years from Earth have found evidence that stellar birth can lead to the formation of a planet only millions of years later, a mere blink on the cosmic timescale.

The mainstream theory is that planets are forged from a disc of gas and dusty debris that is left over from the creation of a star.

How long this process takes is a matter of debate, though.

Earth is believed to be about 4.5 billion years old, and the Sun around 100 million years older.

But observations of some exoplanets -- planets in solar systems other than our own -- suggest the timescale could be much shorter, especially when it comes to the formation of gas giants rather than rocky planets like Earth.

A team led by Johnny Setiawan, an Indonesia-born astronomer at the Max Planck Institute in Heidelberg, Germany, found a massive gas giant, between 5.5 and 13.1 times the size of Jupiter, orbiting within the dust disc of a well-studied star called TW Hydrae.

It takes a mere three and a half Earth days to zip around the star, at a distance of just 600,000 kilometres.

Light from the star suggests that it is between only eight and 10 million years old, which implies that planets can form even before the disc has been dissipated by stellar particles and radiation.

Exoplanets were first spotted in 1995.

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