

LTTE wants India's help to stop military drive

13 Tigers killed in fresh fighting

PTI, AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, engaged in fierce gun-battles with security forces in the island nation's embattled north, want India to intervene to halt the clashes between the warring sides, leading daily here has claimed.

"As the LTTE is currently facing a series of setbacks in the (rebel stronghold of) Wanni warfront with senior LTTE military leaders killed by the security forces, the LTTE is once again seeking India's help to stop the ongoing military operations," the Daily Mirror said.

Besides, the paper claimed, "the Tigers' Political wing had initiated a campaign to pressurise the Indian central government to take action in this regard." "In order to achieve this goal the LTTE is using several channels for the purpose and mainly the pro-LTTE politicians in Tamil Nadu," the report said, adding the pro-rebel MDMK leader Vaiko had made several statements to this effect.

"Knowing that the Indian government can put pressure on the Sri Lankan government, it is learnt

that the Tigers are expecting to use the opportunity to come into a Ceasefire Agreement," the paper said in an editorial yesterday.

The daily recalled that the LTTE's "Peace Secretary" S Pulidevan had recently said the rebels would wait for the Norwegian facilitators to be granted access to Kilinochchi to further discuss issues relating to negotiations.

Meanwhile, security forces killed at least 13 guerrillas in separate attacks in the north and bombed a rebel base, the military said yesterday.

Air force fighter jets pounded a rebel base in Pooneryn late on Friday, hours after the guerrillas set off bombs in the southern suburb of Colombo and central district of Kandy, the defence ministry said.

A crowded state-run bus travelling just south of Colombo was peppered with red-hot shrapnel from a roadside fragmentation mine, killing at least 21 people and injuring more than 50 others.

Hours later, the rebels set off a bomb inside a bus in Kandy, killing two people and wounding 20, the

military said. Police said they were holding a suspect in connection with that attack.

The military blamed the rebels for the bus blasts.

There was no immediate comment from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are fighting to carve out an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the island's north and east.

But the LTTE has previously insisted it does not target civilians.

Human rights groups, however, say both sides are guilty of human rights violations.

The latest 13 reported rebel deaths came in fighting across the embattled north on Friday, the military said.

Casualty figures there are impossible to verify since the defence ministry bars media, rights groups and aid workers from visiting front-line areas, citing safety reasons.

The Sri Lankan government insists it now has the upper hand in the 36-year-old conflict, with the defence ministry reporting the deaths of 4,094 rebels and 339 government soldiers so far this year.

'Pak-US military relations at worst since 9/11'

THE DAILY TIMES, Washington/Lahore

Relations between the United States military and the Pakistan Army are at their worst point since September 11, 2001, senior Western military officers and diplomats have said, as Pakistani troops withdraw from Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan.

According to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, writing in the Washington Post, there are also signs that Washington is delaying delivery of US arms meant for the eastern front and is asking Western allies to do the same.

The report says that army chief General Ashfaq Kayani has told US military and Nato officials that he would not retrain or re-equip troops to fight the counterinsurgency war along Pakistan's western border. Instead, it adds, the bulk of the army would stay deployed on Pakistan's border with India. While the US is training and equipping

100,000 troops of the Frontier Corps, it has rejected Pakistani requests to equip four to five new units, Rashid claims.

According to the report, the Taliban virtually rule Fata. The Pakistani army, it adds, is 'shaken' because of the losses it has suffered, which is why it has offered peace deals to the Taliban, which unfortunately do not stop the Taliban from attacking Nato and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. These attacks from Pakistan are said to have risen sharply. Meanwhile, Baitullah Mehsud has vowed that jihad in Afghanistan will continue, even as Afghan President Hamid Karzai expresses frustration at Pakistan's attitude on 'sanctuaries' in the Tribal Areas.

The Afghan leader is said to have confessed that he has been unsuccessful in "convincing the world to end the sanctuaries for terrorism."



Indian women activists from United Women Front shout anti-Congress-led UPA government slogans during a protest against the government's price hike of petroleum products in New Delhi yesterday. The Indian government hiked fuel prices to stem huge losses at state oil firms caused by surging crude costs, with petrol up by around 11 percent and diesel up by 9.4 percent.

450 Tibetans detained in Kathmandu

AP, Kathmandu

Tibetan exiles marched in protest against Chinese rule over their homeland in Nepal's capital Sunday before police stopped them and detained hundreds of demonstrators, authorities said.

The protesters marched about three miles into the heart of Kathmandu before police in riot gear blocked them. Police used bamboo batons to beat some of them and detained at least 450, said police official RP Dhamala at the scene.

Many of the protesters were Buddhist nuns and monks. Scuffles between police and protesters left many with bruises and minor cuts but no major injuries were reported.

"Stop killing in Tibet. We want freedom," the protesters chanted as they marched through the narrow streets of Kathmandu through the tourist hub of Thamel.

Once they reached the main streets, police blocked their way and then hauled them away in vans and trucks when they tried to break past the police line.

Officials say they cannot allow protests against friendly nations including China, and police have orders not to let the Tibetans protest in Kathmandu.



An Indonesian search and rescue team evacuates five victims of the sea accident at Labuhan Bajo port in Labuhan Bajo yesterday. Five European divers fought off a komodo dragon and survived on shellfish for two nights after being washed up on a deserted Indonesian island, a French survivor said.

Water drains from quake-formed lake

AP, Mianyang

Water flowed slowly into a man-made spillway yesterday from a swollen lake formed by a landslide in China's devastating earthquake, easing the immediate threat of a flood that had led to the evacuation of more than 250,000 people.

Engineers were monitoring bridges and river banks downstream to see if they would hold under the rush of water, and work crews were trying to dig a secondary channel to improve the flow. China Central Television and the Xinhua News Agency reported.

Water had been building behind the landslide for nearly four weeks, creating a massive lake that had to be drained carefully to prevent a surge. Even after the draining began, water levels continued to rise

but more slowly, appearing to stabilize at a level the government said was unlikely to undermine the dam.

"Emergency work is still proceeding urgently, but in the foreseeable future there's no risk of the dam collapsing," Xinhua quoted Chengdu Military Region Deputy Commander Fan Xiaoguang as saying.

Although experts said the potential for flooding remained, the government seemed relieved and people who have been evacuated to cramped camps for safety anticipated leaving.

"I wish the water would hurry up so we can go home," said Wang Jing, a 25-year-old nurse packed with an estimated 9,500 others into the branch campus of the Sichuan Music School in Mianyang city. "My house is fine."

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Pakistani policemen inspect the damaged police vehicle in Dera Ismail Khan yesterday, a day after a bomb targeted a police party. Five people including three policemen were killed when the bomb apparently targeting a police party exploded in northwestern Pakistan.

Bicycle blast kills 5 in northwest Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Five people including three police officers were killed when a bomb apparently targeting police exploded in northwestern Pakistan overnight, police said yesterday.

The remote-controlled device, planted on a bicycle, detonated late Friday in Dera Ismail Khan town, local police chief Ghaffar Qaisarani told AFP.

The bicycle was parked near an open place where another bomb had earlier exploded without causing harm, he said.

The bicycle bomb exploded soon after police arrived to investigate the first incident, he said. More than a dozen people were wounded, including nine police officers.

"It appears the police party was the target," he said.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Qaisarani believed the blast could be linked to the unrest in North West Frontier Province and the rugged tribal terrain bordering Afghanistan.

Dera Ismail Khan is in the grip of sectarian tension after recent clashes between militants from the majority Sunni and the minority Shiite Muslim communities.

Pakistan has suffered a spate of attacks in recent days despite ongoing peace talks between the new government, which took power in March, and Islamic militants based in the lawless northwestern tribal regions.

1.5 million cyclone survivors without shelter in Myanmar

AP, Yangon

A severe shortage of housing has left hundreds of thousands of cyclone survivors in Myanmar exposed to heavy rain as the monsoon season begins, aid agencies said Saturday.

The United Nations and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said there was an urgent need for tarpaulins to provide temporary shelter to an estimated 1.5 million homeless survivors. Otherwise, the threats of hunger and disease could intensify, they warned.

"Exposure to the elements five weeks after a disaster of this magnitude has to be a major concern," said John Sparrow, a spokesman for the IFRC. "People are in a weakened

condition. They are sick; they are hungry. Without shelter, their whole situation is seriously exacerbated."

Sparrow estimated that only a quarter of those who need shelter materials have been reached.

The UN estimates 2.4 million people were affected when Cyclone Nargis hit May 2-3, and warns that more than 1 million still need help, mostly in the hard-to-reach Irrawaddy delta.

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