

Red Cross office attacked as Lanka blames it for inciting panic

Troops seize more Tiger bases

AFP, Colombo

A stone-throwing mob attacked the offices of the Red Cross in Sri Lanka's capital Friday as the government accused the agency of inciting panic over civilian deaths from fighting with Tamil Tiger rebels.

Government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had placed an order for 35,000 body bags to be used in the northeast where Tiger rebels have been cornered by the military.

"There is no need for 35,000 body bags or for that matter 3,500," Rambukwella told reporters shortly after the attack on the ICRC main office in a high security area of Colombo.

"They may cancel the order tomorrow. But first they want to create a fear psychosis in the eyes of the international community," he said.

Sri Lanka had denied an ICRC statement last week that "hundreds" of civilians had been killed in fighting between the government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The crowd of around 200 protesters that gathered outside the Red Cross office shouted slogans, including "ICRC go home," before being dispersed by police.

"They were shouting slogans and pelting stones. No one was hurt fortunately, but some windows were broken," ICRC spokeswoman Sophie Romanens told AFP.

The office is located next to the resi-

dence of a tightly-guarded government minister.

Romanens confirmed an order for body bags but rejected the figure provided by Rambukwella.

"We help in the transfer of bodies of combatants across the front lines and for this we need body bags, but the number we have ordered is far, far less than 35,000," she said.

Sri Lankan troops yesterday captured more Tamil Tiger bases, including a camp of the rebel leader's security unit, as UN chief Ban Ki-moon raised fresh concerns for civilians trapped in the war zone.

The security forces seized a large quantity of automatic assault rifles, detonators and hand grenades from three LTTE camps, a military official said.

Taliban kill two 'US spies' in Pak tribal area

AFP, Miranshah

Taliban militants shot dead two men in Pakistan's lawless tribal belt on the border with Afghanistan after accusing them of spying for the United States, local official said yesterday.

The incident took place in Miranshah, the main town in the restive North Waziristan, which is a known stronghold of al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents, tribal security official Said Ahmad Khan told AFP.

The victims were identified as Aalm Pir and the second only by one name, Khan.



PHOTO: AFP

Handout picture released yesterday by Sri Lankan President's Office, shows a group of school children attending classes at a makeshift camp for internally displaced people in the northern district of Vavuniya. The government has set up large makeshift camps to house thousands of civilians fleeing the fighting from Tamil Tiger controlled areas in the north.

Pak Shia mobs stage protests after mosque bombing

AFP, MULTAN, Dera Ghazi Khan

Mobs sacked property and protesters called for revenge in central Pakistan yesterday after a bomb killed 33 people near a mosque in one of the country's deadliest anti-Shia attacks.

Police said 33 people were killed and 52 wounded when a suspected suicide bomber ripped through a crowd near a Shia mosque in the town of Dera Ghazi Khan in the central Punjab province late Thursday.

"We have arrested 16 suspects for questioning in connection with the blast," Shaukat Javed, the police chief of Punjab province, told AFP by telephone.

The attack was the deadliest bombing since October in Pakistan, where extremists opposed to the government's support for the US-led "war on terror" have killed more than 1,500 people in just over a year and a half.

In Dera Ghazi Khan, schools, shops, businesses and offices were closed follow-



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistanis protest against the killing of Shia Muslims in Dera Ghazi Khan yesterday. Shia mobs staged violent protests in a central Pakistan town, police said as community leaders demanded action to stem sectarian violence after a bomb near a mosque killed 33 people.

Ensure Pakistan fulfils promise to end terror

India tells UN

PTI, New Delhi

India on Friday said the United Nations should ensure that Pakistan fulfills its commitment to end terrorism emanating from its soil.

External affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee said he had apprised UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon on Thursday about the details of the Mumbai attacks which were carried out by elements based in Pakistan.

"I had a detailed discussion (with Ban) in the context of the terror attack on Mumbai and the material which we have given to Pakistan and shared with the entire international community by sending letters to foreign ministers," he told reporters on the sidelines of a conference on the global financial crisis.

"I requested the UN secretary-general to look into those aspects and ensure that Pakistan fully implements its own commitments which it has given to India and the international community several times," Mukherjee said.

Mukherjee apprised Ban on the Mumbai attacks, how 10 heavily armed Pakistani terrorists came from Karachi via sea to Mumbai and struck terror in the city for three days from November 26 last year.

UN urges Myanmar rulers, opposition to resume substantive talks

AFP, United Nations

UN chief Ban Ki-moon is appealing to Myanmar's military rulers and opposition to resume early, substantive negotiations without preconditions, his spokeswoman said Thursday.

Michele Montas said the secretary general issued the appeal after being briefed in New Delhi by his special adviser Ibrahim Gambari on the outcome of his four-day visit to Myanmar, which

ended Tuesday.

She added that Ban, who was in the Indian capital on the last leg of a two-week swing through Europe, Africa and Asia, looked forward "to building on the Gambari visit to further foster national dialogue and reconciliation" in Myanmar.

Ban "calls on the government and opposition to resume substantive dialogue without preconditions and without further delay," Montas said.

Foreign troops kill 6 Afghans in south

AP, Kandahar

International troops killed six Afghan men in an overnight raid on a village in southern Afghanistan. A provincial official said the men were civilians, but the US military said they were militants.

Civilian deaths are a hot-button issue in Afghanistan, with president Hamid Karzai repeatedly calling on foreign troops to do more to prevent the deaths of innocents and asking for more control over foreign military operations in the country.

Reports often differ on whether those killed in raids are insurgents or civilians. The Taliban are powerful across southern Afghanistan and often hide out in villages, while villagers who are not part of the insurgency are often still armed.

Zabul Province's deputy governor, Gulab Shah Alikheil, said six men were killed and three were arrested late Thursday night in a raid by foreign troops on a village in Shahresafa District. He said the dead were four brothers from one family, and two from another.

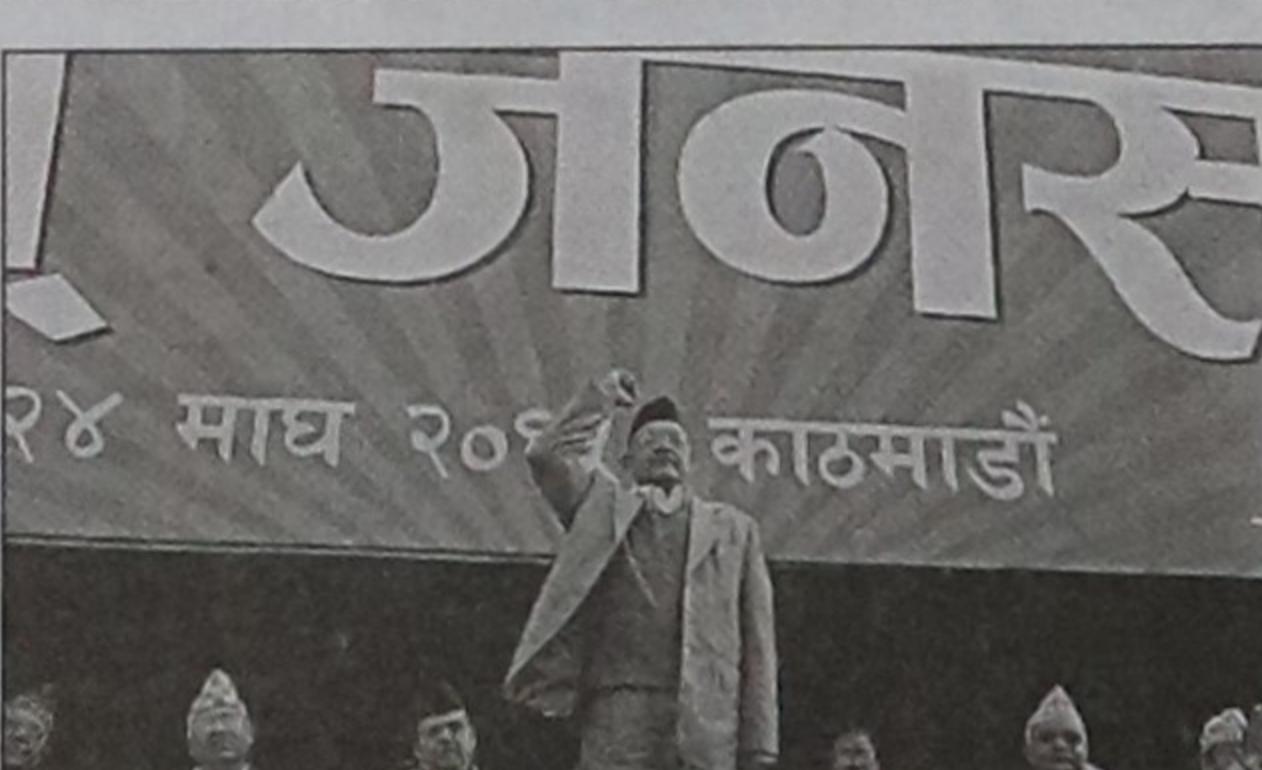


PHOTO: AFP
Nepalese Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist top leader and Home Minister Bam Dev Gutam salutes party cadres during a mass gathering in Kathmandu yesterday. The CPN-UML, the third largest party in Nepal and a coalition partner of the Maoist-led government, will hold its general convention on February 16-21.

Russia allows transit of US military supplies

AP, Moscow

Russia said Friday that it will start allowing US military supplies for Afghanistan to cross its territory, while Kyrgyzstan said it will not reverse its decision to close a key US air base.

Kyrgyzstan's National Security Council chief appeared to dash any US hopes of securing a last-minute reprieve for the Manas air base. Russia's move is unlikely to make up for the loss of the base, home to air operations like refueling and medical evacuation.

But Russia's opening of routes for non-lethal supplies could provide an important alternative to roads through Pakistan that are increasingly threatened by militant attacks.

CIA nominee vows to break with Bush's terror policies

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama's choice to head the CIA made clear Thursday he would break with Bush administration policy against terror suspects, saying detainees would not be subjected to torture while in US custody or in allied countries.

Leon Panetta, nominated as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told a Senate hearing that he considered waterboarding -- used by the previous administration against at least three terror suspects -- to be "wrong" and that he opposed transferring detainees to countries where they may face torture or other abuse.

Panetta promised to uphold the law and to repair relations between Congress and the embattled spy agency, which has been castigated over flawed intelligence reports in the run-up to the Iraq war and controversial tactics in the "war on terror."

Asked at the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing whether the agency would continue the practice of so-called extraordinary renditions to foreign states, Panetta said: "No, we will not."

Pakistan arrests 50 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's Maritime Security Agency said Friday it has seized nine boats and arrested 50 Indian fishermen for illegally trawling in its waters in the Arabian Sea.

Indian fishermen have violated Pakistani territorial waters despite several warnings. We arrested them for the same reason. Nine boats were seized and 50 fishermen arrested," MSA spokesman Lieutenant Commander Shakil Khan said.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov did not specify if Russia would provide land or air corridors but the US and other Nato states have mostly been interested in land routes that would let them to more cheaply move bulky cargo.

By welcoming the transit of US supplies, Lavrov appeared to send a signal to Washington that Russia is ready to help on Afghanistan if the US deals with Moscow when it comes to Central Asia.

Russia last year signed a framework deal with Nato for transit of non-lethal cargo for coalition forces in Afghanistan and has allowed some alliance members, including Germany and Spain to move supplies across its territory.

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