

## Red Cross sends food aid to Sri Lanka war zone

AP, Colombo

Sri Lankan naval boats accompanied an emergency Red Cross shipment of food aid for tens of thousands of civilians trapped in the north-eastern war zone Wednesday as the Tamil Tiger rebels once again appealed for a halt to the war and a new round of peace talks.

Government forces pledging to end the quarter-century civil war have pushed the rebels to the brink of defeat in recent weeks, seizing their strongholds across the north and trapping them in a 100-square kilometre strip of land along the coast.

Aid groups estimate about 200,000 civilians are stuck in heavy fighting, though the government says the number is less than 100,000. The government has denied accusations it shelled areas filled with civilians, while the rebels denied reports they shot at

families trying to escape. Rebel political chief Balasingham Nadesan accused the government of creating a humanitarian crisis in the area, and denied UN accusations that it was recruiting child soldiers and holding the local civilian population as human shields against the government offensive.

The United Nations said earlier this week that those caught in the fighting were facing severe shortages of food, medicine and clean water. An increasing number have fallen ill.

The Red Cross said it was sending 30 tons of dry rations to the civilians in the north. Aid workers say a minimum of 2,500 tons a month is required to feed the civilians trapped there.

Navy spokesman Capt DKP Dassanayake said naval boats were accompanying the Red Cross vessel.

### TALIBAN PEACE DEAL

## Pakistan emanating 'contradictory' messages: Hillary

PTI, Washington

There are "contradictory communications" emanating from Islamabad about what it intends to achieve in the peace deal with Taliban in the restive Swat valley, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said.

"I want to get the whole picture of what it is they're attempting to achieve," Hillary said in Tokyo during her first official visit after taking over as the Secretary of State.

She said US will "thoroughly study" the deal, before reacting to it, but expressed concern over the situation in Pakistan.

"The entire situation in Pakistan is a concern," Hillary told the ABC news in an interview, her first as the Secretary of State to a TV news channel.

Hillary, who is currently

travelling to Tokyo, however, said she would like to thoroughly study the peace deal between Pakistan and the Taliban militants before making any comments.

"Obviously, we believe that the activity by the extremist elements in Pakistan poses a direct threat to the Government of Pakistan, as well as to the security of the US, Afghanistan and a number of other nations," she said, according to a State Department transcript of the interview.

"So before I comment on what its meaning might be, I want to be sure that we have as good an understanding of both the Pakistan Government's intention and the actual agreed-upon language. And that I don't have at this time, so I want to wait until we can provide that," she said.

## Break law, get punished

FROM PAGE 1

The clashes however got ample time to die down as Hasina, also the organisational leader of BCL, reached the venue late, at 12:50pm, although she had been scheduled to be there at 11:00am.

The area of the stage where she sat was surrounded by bulletproof glass, and the same was the case with the lectern from where she delivered her speech.

The prime minister opened the event by hoisting the national and her party flags, followed by releasing of balloons and white pigeons into the air.

BCL President Mahmud Hasan Ripon, and General Secretary Mahfuzul Haider Chowdhury Roton also spoke at the event attended by many former BCL presidents and general secretaries, senior AL leaders, and ministers, along with a large number of current BCL activists.

**HASINA BLASTS THE MEDIA** The prime minister also embarked on a tirade against the media saying a section of it has started criticising the AL-led coalition government too soon, as it assumed power only 37 to 38 days ago, adding they are raising a rancorous even for minor infractions.

She said the media should compare neutrally and honestly the present situation with the post-election situation in 2001. After the 2001 election, she alleged, the winning BNP-Jamaat alliance carried out killings, grabbed lands, and occupied student dorms.

During the last AL rule, one journalist was harassed, whereas 14 journalists were killed during the BNP-led four-party alliance regime, she compared.

Their pens were not as sharp back then, as they are now, she complained adding, "Why this discrimination I don't understand."

"I don't have an Aladdin's lamp," she went on, "Don't think we don't know at all the reason for the discrimination! In fact they are taking out on us, their own frustrations of failing to implement the minus two formula."

She said her ruling coalition will keep on working for the nation and for the wellbeing of

the people, not for the interest of any individual.

Referring to media reports that BCL does not listen to her instructions, she said if Chhatra League did not listen to her instructions, then BNP's student wing Jatiyatbadi Chhatra Dal would not be able to celebrate its founding anniversary in Dhaka University's Modhu's Canteen by cutting a cake just two days after the general election.

She said there was no freedom of expression and no democracy in the country during the emergency caretaker rule of the last two years.

As AL came to power through a movement and the December 29, 2008 parliamentary election, the people are now free and independent, she claimed.

She also said, "Freedom is not a license... everyone must respect the law."

She blamed BNP-Jamaat's last five-year tenure for the spread of terrorism, thuggery, corruption, and extortion.

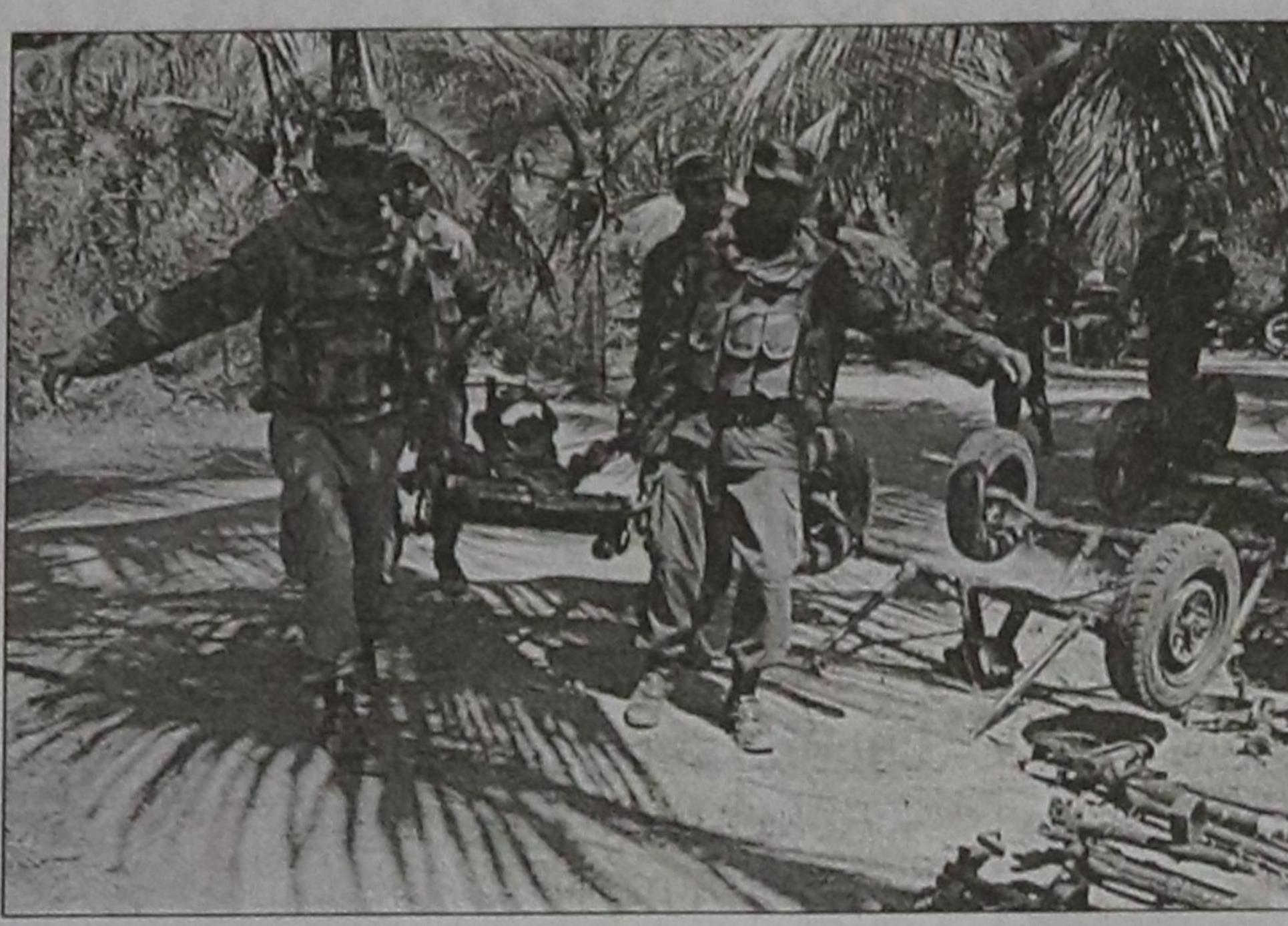
She said the immediate past caretaker government tried to clear some of the mess at its nascent stage, but did not succeed because it got too busy with its 'minus-two formula'.

She however mentioned of a flawless voter list and a fair election, as successes of the caretaker government.

The prime minister said there are some people who always want to join the ruling party, adding, "But I don't want to give any chance to those opportunists, as they will make trouble after joining... we can't take responsibility of the actions of those elements. We don't need any new force, as we have the people's mandate."

She urged her student followers to prepare themselves as worthy citizens, acquiring knowledge through scientific education, which she said are prerequisites for building up a digital Bangladesh by 2021, pledged by their party Awami League.

Hasina also announced that the national conference of BCL will be held soon, where genuine students will become future leaders of the student organisation through an election.



This handout picture released by the Sri Lankan Ministry yesterday, shows troops carrying dismantled artillery guns captured from Tamil Tiger guerrillas in Wanni in the island's northeast on February 16. Government forces yesterday have rejected calls for a truce with the Tigers who are cornered in a narrow strip of land in the north-east.

## Pakistanis rally for peace in Swat valley

Britain, US ponder over Taliban peace deal

AP, Mingora

white flags representing the Taliban and peace, marched through Swat's main city of Mingora as jubilant residents chanted "God is great! We want peace!"

Fighting between security forces and militants has killed hundreds of people in Swat over the past year, while up to a third of the valley's 1.5 million people have fled. While many Swat residents are desperate for calm, critics warned the deal could embolden militants.

Nato and Britain raised

concerns about the deal,

which imposes Islamic law

and suspends a military offen-

sive in the one-time tourist

haven that is now largely

under militant control. Nato,

which has 55,000 troops

across the border in

Afghanistan, warned the deal

risked giving extremists a "safe haven."

But the US reacted cau-

tiously, with the State

Department saying it was still

trying to understand

Pakistan's strategy.

The regional government

in Pakistan's northwest struck

the deal Monday with Sufi

Muhammad, an aging pro-

Talib cleric who is father-in-

law to Swat Taliban leader

Maulana Fazlullah.

Muhammad agreed to talk to

Fazlullah in return for the

pledge to introduce Islamic

law in the valley, where mili-

tants have routed the police,

beheaded political oppo-

nents and burned scores of schools

for girls.

Muhammad and his sup-

porters, carrying black and

white flags

representing the

Talib and peace,

marched through Swat's main city of Mingora as jubilant residents chanted "God is great! We want peace!"

The truce "is certainly reason for concern," Nato spokesman James Appatullah said Tuesday in Brussels. "We should all be concerned by a situation in which extremists

would have a safe haven."

A statement from the British High Commission in Islamabad noted, "Previous peace deals have not provided a comprehensive and long-term solution to Swat's problems."

"We need to be confident that they will end violence not create space for further violence," it said.

Pakistani officials insist the deal is not a concession, but rather that it addresses the long-standing demands of residents in Swat and surrounding areas for a more efficient justice system.

The main changes involve already existing regulations

that were never enforced, for instance, allowing religious scholars to advise judges, officials said. There are no publicized plans to ban girls from schooling, as hardline Taliban would want.

"We will not introduce the Taliban system here," Bashir Bilour, a senior provincial government leader, said yesterday. "This is a system about justice. It is for producing swift justice."

Federal Information Minister Sherry Rehman has said President Asif Ali Zardari would not sign off on the agreement "until peace is restored in the region." The Swat Taliban, meanwhile, have said they will stop fighting once Islamic law is in place and are already observing a cease-fire.

When pressed by reporters at the State Department on Tuesday spokesman Gordon Duguid said the US was seeking a "fuller explanation" from Pakistan.

A similar deal in Swat last year collapsed in a few months and was blamed for giving insurgents time to regroup.

Some 2,000 militants are believed to operate in the valley and in defiance of some 10,000 paramilitary and army troops have already set up their own courts, meting out punishments in line with an exceptionally harsh brand of Islamic law.

Supporters of a cleric Soori Mohammad gather as they march during a peace rally on the streets of Mingora in the troubled Swat valley yesterday. Around 15,000 people marched for peace in Pakistan's Swat valley led by Mohammad, leader of the Sharia movement, who signed a deal to enforce Islamic law in the troubled area, witnesses and police said.

**Taliban blow up 2 Pak girls' schools**

AFP, Khar

Suspected Taliban fighters blew up two girls' schools yesterday while eight militants were killed in clashes with the military in northwest Pakistan, an official said.

The two primary schools were detonated in the Nawagai and Salarzai areas of Bajaur, where the Pakistani military has waged a massive offensive designed to clear the area of extremist Islamists.

Militants have destroyed 30 schools, most of them for girls, in different areas of Bajaur since August 2008, Khan said.

Khan said Pakistani government troops, backed by helicopter gunships, killed eight militants in battles with extremist rebels.

Locals caught one of the criminals and handed him in to the police and Rab with his mobile phone. Both the agencies assured the victim of recovering the money within a few hours as they had got one criminal with cell phone.

Both the agencies immediately asked reporters not to run the news to help them net the muggers. But the other muggers are still at large and the money hasn't been recovered.

The law-enforcers later told the victims it is difficult to recover the money as the muggers switched off their cellphones.

The victim was further told that the law-enforcers were busy with "bigger crimes" and did not have enough time to pay for a "petty" incident.

Sources however say a source of Detective Branch (DB) was involved in the incident and that is why the police are not much interested in the case.

Supporters of the bandh, called by a local action committee and supported by several major social organisations, damaged vehicles at Sagolband, Kakwa, Yunnam Leikai and many other places for defying it, the reports said.

They said supporters of the bandh blocked the road at many places in Imphal and greater Imphal areas and set fire to vehicle tyres at major roads here.

## Panic spreads

FROM PAGE 1

insecurity in the public mind.

"Whatever the crime statistics are, my observation is that perceptively the sense of insecurity has increased a bit," says M Shahjahan, former inspector general of police (IGP).

"Crimes like mugging, hijacking and robbery have increased, while activities of the ogyan and malom parties [dope gangs] have created panic among the people," adds Shahjahan, who is also a former adviser to the caretaker government.

It is very urgent to restore confidence of the people in police," he said.

He added criminals always work through a network, which becomes more active under the political governments as they consider this atmosphere in their favour.

"The criminals always search for a guardian who has control over the police. A nexus is established comprising criminals, a section of police and politicians," he observed.

"Steps should be taken against the guardians of the criminals to abolish the criminals' networks or the nexus."

Meanwhile, some police officials say they are considering the present situation as a transitional period because of probable transfer and posting as all the new governments do so.

Some of them express fear of politicisation in their department in the name of transfer, posting and promotion.

"I don't know my next destination, so it's better to go slow to understand the changed situation," says an officer-in-charge of a police station in the capital.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Naim Ahmed told The Daily Star they have beefed up security measures including installation of check posts, police patrol and special drives.

Home Minister Sahara Khatoon on Friday at DMP Headquarters told journalists there is no reluctance among the police and the force is working sincerely.

But the patrol of police and Rab and their presence on the roads and crime scenes are apparently less compared to the time before the December 29 national polls.

## Muhih vows stern action

FROM PAGE 16

government) was the first to identify them and take action against them. This time more stringent action would be taken," he said.

The finance minister was talking to journalists after a meeting with the Bangladesh (BB) authorities.

The one and a half hour meeting was attended by BB Governor Salehuddin Ahmed, deputy governors Nazrul Huda, Ziaul Hasan Siddiqui and Murshid Kuli Khan and other high officials.