

Sri Lanka rejects calls for truce as fighting escalates

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government yesterday rejected fresh calls for a truce with Tamil Tigers as troops took another village from rebel control and concern mounted for civilians trapped in the warzone.

Defence spokesman Keheloya Rambukwella said the government was firmly committed to wiping out "terrorism" and described the demand for a ceasefire from a Tamil Tiger proxy as "laughable".

"We have taken a policy decision to completely root out terrorism," Rambukwella told reporters here. "There will be no ceasefire with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)."

The ceasefire appeal from the Tamil National Alliance echoed calls from Sri Lanka's key international financial backers, including the US, European Union and Japan, for a "no fire period" to allow civilians to get out of harm's way.

A pro-government Tamil legislator said on Tuesday that 288 civilians had been killed during one week this month while nearly 800 were wounded in crossfire in the shrinking territory still under rebel control.

The fighting has provoked a strong reaction in neighbour-

JS seat row

FROM PAGE 16
Opposition Chief Whip Joyal Abedin Faruk said at a press briefing at the opposition leader's conference room.

He said they met the speaker yesterday and accepted his invitation to meet him today. The speaker also invited Chief Whip of treasury bench Abdus Shahid to the talks.

The BNP-led opposition lawmakers continue to abstain from the House proceeding since January 28 protesting the new seating arrangement made by Speaker Abdul Hamid.

Immediate past speaker Jamiruddin Sircar unilaterally allocated all seats in the front and second rows to his left to the opposition lawmakers ignoring the treasury bench's suggestion.

Later, Speaker Abdul Hamid rearranged the seat plan allocating four front-row seats out of 10 and four more out of 12 seats to the BNP lawmakers in the second row in the House.

BNP-led opposition lawmakers began boycotting the House from January 28 demanding reinstatement of the previous seating arrangement.

Delwar

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government's responsibility to make the House effective by making sure participation of opposition legislators," he added.

Delwar was highly critical of two supplementary questions placed in the House on Monday by Meher Afroze and Zillul Hakim about the alleged money laundering of Khaleda Zia and her son Arafat Rahman Koko.

He said the speaker should not have entertained such questions, as these were completely irrelevant to the main question.

Meher Afroze wanted to know about Koko's money confiscated in Hong Kong while Zillul Hakim asked finance minister if he knew about Khaleda Zia's taking 400 luggages full of taka, dollar and gold during her visit to Saudi Arabia for performing umrah.

"It was absolute violation of rules of procedure. In fact they wanted to defame Khaleda Zia and the opposition which proves they have no intention to run the parliament with the opposition's involvement in the process," Delwar said.

Delwar, also a former chief whip of the parliament urged all not to campaign propaganda against the opposition.

Replying to a question, BNP secretary general said ruling party's cadres are responsible for the deterioration of law and order situation.

He also alleged that BNP chairperson's staffs are facing obstacles while entering into her cantonment residence. "It was unexpected from a political government," he said.

BNP leader Moazzem Hossain Alal, Rizvi Ahmed, Shirin Sultana, Rehana Akhter Ranu, Helen Zerin Khan and Manuf Kamal Khan Sohel were present during the briefing. None of the party lawmakers was present.

Food prices may go up again

Says FAO adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Food prices might go up across the globe again due to reduced production caused by declining profitability of farmers, a FAO official warned yesterday.

"Low world food prices are good for consumers, but declining profitability is likely to have negative effects on levels of production. Reduced global production may drive world prices up again," said Ciro Fiorillo, chief technical adviser of NFPSP, a FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) programme.

"Competitiveness of domestic production declines as lower world fuel and fertiliser prices cannot be fully reflected domestically due to subsidies," he said at a workshop in the capital organised by National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme (NFPSP).

Though Bangladesh is achieving self-sufficiency in rice, there is no reason for complacency, Ciro Fiorillo said. Poverty level may increase as reduced exports and remittances may affect national income, employment and fiscal revenue in the wake of global financial crisis, he added.

The minister also said that the taskforce would be active round the year so that unscrupulous traders cannot create artificial textbook crisis in the market.

"We will ask all deputy commissioners to collect exact number of students from class VI to X from their respective districts to get the total number to solve the crisis," Nahid added.

The minister also said anyone can find textbooks in the PDF format at the NCTB website from class VI to X.

Meanwhile, the members of recently formed taskforce for textbooks early yesterday seized 10,000 fake books with 17,700 cover pages, and 651 reams of low quality papers from several publishing houses at Badamtali in Bangladesh.

Protesting the raid, many publishers did not open their shops at daytime. Later, they opened their shops at the mediation of the education minister, said sources.

Bhutan offers

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minister told reporters after meeting Ambassador Tshering Dorji at his office in the morning.

Stating that there is an ample scope for enhancing trade between the two countries, Faruk Khan said, "We, the two countries, agreed to enhance trade and investment by giving priority to our respective interests."

The minister observed democratic governments are now operative in Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and India where business was used as political arms instead of key to development in previous times.

"We destroyed our market in the region; we should give priority to trade by taking lesson from the past," he said.

The envoy invited Bangladesh to participate in the next SAARC trade fair in Bhutan.

Student beaten

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Meanwhile, Uttara police arrested one of the accused Mahmud Hasan Rana yesterday afternoon.

Rana said Nasim and Touhid took Tk 5,000 from them for supplying beer. As the supply was not made, they locked in an altercation leading to a clash.

Deputy Commissioner of Uttara Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Khandaker Rafiqul Islam told The Daily Star that Nasim and Touhid used to supply liquors to the university students.

Saiful Alam Chowdhury, officer-in-charge (OC) of Uttara Police Station said police are looking for the other accused.

After the death of the student, the university authorities yesterday cancelled all academic activities for two days to avert any untoward incidents.

Dr Shamsul Huq, vice-chancellor of the university, told The Daily Star, "We have closed the university as one of our students died."

Asked, the VC said the incident took place outside campus and the authorities were yet to find out the cause behind the murder.

HC asks govt

FROM PAGE 1
place very often across the country and many people are being killed or injured, as there is no sufficient traffic system at the railway crossings.

He prayed to the court to direct the authorities concerned so that they take appropriate measures to prevent rail accidents and to provide proper treatment to the victims of Tuesday's accident.

JS bodies formed

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Talking to The Daily Star last night, Faruk said, "We are yet to send the names of our lawmakers for the standing committees, then how could they make our lawmakers the chiefs of two standing committees?"

Faruk along with other party lawmakers discussed the matter with BNP Chief Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office.

"We shall give a formal reaction over the formation of standing committees after the BNP parliamentary party's meeting today," added Faruk.

On approval of Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, Chief Whip Abdus Shahid proposed the names of the lawmakers to form the committees and the House unanimously approved the proposals.

According to the rules of procedure of the Jatiya Sangsad, the standing committees will scrutinise the bills which will be sent to those after their placement in parliament, while PAC will deal with the audit reports placed in parliament.

AL lawmakers KH

Bad loans

FROM PAGE 1
"A good number of private banks are doing aggressive banking," said a central bank official. Bangladesh Bank expressed its concern over the high credit growth after 18 private banks out of 30 registered 30 to 61 per cent credit growth last year.

Huge amounts of loan have been disbursed in consumer goods sector. In September 2008 loans for consumer goods including motorbike, refrigerator and credit card rose from 31 per cent to 2,300 per cent compared to September 2007.

A Bangladesh Bank official said they were closely monitoring the credit growth and hoped it would come down.

Referring to the decrease in default loans with the SoBs, Bangladesh Bank said default loans in the SoBs fell due to reforms and absence of political interference in the last two years.

In December 2008, default loans with SoBs stood at Tk 12,764 crore or 25.44 per cent of the outstanding loans while it was Tk 13,791 crore or 29.87 per cent in December 2007.

Default loan with private commercial banks (PCBs) in December 2008 was Tk 5,698 crore or 4.44 per cent of the outstanding loans whereas it was Tk 4,921 crore or 5.01 per cent in December 2007.

In December 2008, default loan with foreign commercial banks (FCBs) stood at Tk 286 crore or 1.90 per cent of the outstanding loan while it was Tk 194 crore or 1.49 per cent in December 2007.

Default loans with specialised banks in December 2008 was Tk 3,732 crore or 25.45 per cent of the outstanding loan whereas it was Tk 3,716 crore or 28.58 per cent in December 2007.

Hasina

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by its Co-chairman Lord Eric Avebury called on her at the Prime Minister's Office.

Hasina told the delegation that she in 1981 for the first time suggested resolving the CHT problems politically and the last Awami League government in 1996 formed a cell to identify the problems.

Following the initiatives, the long-expected CHT peace accord was signed in 1997.

"Many of the clauses of the peace treaty were implemented by the last AL government, but later the process was halted," she said.

But now the new government has started working again to resolve the problems in the CHT areas in line with the peace accord, she told the team.

The PM said the government already has initiated some development programmes, especially on communications and infrastructures, in the hill districts.

To a query, Hasina said, "Development did not take place at optimum level in the country as the last BNP-led four-party alliance government through politicisation almost destroyed the democratic institutions."

She asserted that all democratic institutions of the country will be strengthened further.

And all problems of the country, including the CHT issues, would be removed as the only objective of her government's activities is to ensure maximum welfare of the people, she said.

The delegation also congratulated Sheikh Hasina on forming the government through a free, fair, neutral and acceptable election.

Rashiduzzaman will lead PAC, Shajahan Khan to head the standing committee on the labour and employment ministry, engineer Mosharaf Hossain to lead the committee on civil aviation and tourism ministry, Nur-e-Alam Chowdhury to head the committee on shipping ministry, Omar Faruk Chowdhury to the committee on communications ministry, Maj Gen (ret) Subid Ali Bhuiyan to lead the committee on energy, power and mineral resources ministry, Meher Afroze to head the committee on women and children affairs ministry, Saydul Haque to head the committee on food and disaster management ministry and Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury to lead the committee on textile and jute ministry.

Two posts for each of the standing committees were kept vacant for the BNP-led opposition lawmakers and the lawmakers to be elected to reserved seats for women.

Kibria murder

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Further investigation is being carried out in Kibria murder case and the progress seems very good," a senior home minister official said after the meeting.

Ten BNP men were accused in the charge sheet submitted by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) during the last BNP-led coalition government. But the latest probe findings cleared the alleged accused Harkat-ul-Jihad-ul-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI) instead.

Five persons, including Kibria died in the incident.

The meeting also decided to revive the Udichi bomb blast case in Jessore in 1999 and re-try all the accused acquitted in the case, said the official.

"We will take opinions of the law ministry in this regard," he said, adding that the meeting of the monitoring cell examined 10 sensational cases and included three more, which would be discussed in its next meeting in March.

Khmer Rouge

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when a decision would be made.

Among those who are to be summoned to testify are British journalist Nic Dunlop, who discovered Duch in northwestern Cambodia in 1999. An American scholar, David Chandler, the author of several books on Cambodia, will also be asked to testify, the court said.

Duch oversaw the S-21 prison in Phnom Penh - previously a school, now the Tuol Sleng genocide museum - where some 16,000 men, women and children were detained and tortured. Only a handful survived.

Duch, 66, is the only defendant who has expressed remorse for his actions. He is accused of committing or abetting a range of crimes including murder, torture and rape. He did not address the court Tuesday but through his lawyer he again voiced regret.

After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, Duch disappeared for two decades, living under two other names and converting to Christianity before he was located by Dunlop, the British journalist.

Judges also still need to decide whether to admit as evidence a short film shot by Vietnamese soldiers when they entered Tuol Sleng prison in January 1979 after toppling the Khmer Rouge.

Manna Dey

FROM PAGE 16
Bangalees for their language. It has been the life stream of the Bangla songs over the centuries.

A group of at least eight poets from Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai also visited the Ekushey Bidi yesterday.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,584 new titles have so far arrived at the Amar Ekushey Bidi Mela from February 1 and around 1500 more new titles are expected till the end, February 28.

"We are expecting the number of new titles to exceed 3,000 by the end of the fair," Anwar Mushed, Bangla Academy Public Relation Officer told The Daily Star.

Eminent writer Selina Hossain, Jatin Sarker and Shahriar Kabir unveiled the cover of a book titled General Matin-e-Shadinar Itihash Bikritir Itikatha by Ali Akbar Tabi from Aamard Mati Prokashani at the fair premises.

A total of 88 new titles arrived at the fair yesterday including Jagriti Rammayo by Ahsan Habib, Megher Kabita by Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah, Nirmalendu Goon, Syfullah Ahmed Dulal and Shahid Kaderi, Paribartanar Chara by Nurul Huda, Muktyuddho Secret Diplomacy by Prof Abu Syyed, and Charar Mala by Nazia Jabeen.

Truck looted by Dinajpur 'BCL men'

A CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A truck loaded with goods worth Tk 5 lakh was looted allegedly by the activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of Awami League (AL), at Ghoraghat in Dinajpur on Tuesday.

The cumin-laden truck was heading for Bogra when the BCL activists came from behind on four motorcycles and stopped it at Binakuri Bazar under Ghoraghat upazila around 6:00pm.

Armed youths numbering nine to ten led by Tayebur, Habibul, Milon and Mamun forced the drivers and helpers to take the truck to a nearby brickfield where they looted the cumin.

Proshanto Kumar Das, a businessman from Hakimpur upazila in Dinajpur said, Hills Customs House sold the cumin at an open auction on February 9 and 15 and he bought them in two installments.

When contacted Ghoraghat upazila BCL convener Md Asaduzzaman Bhutto said he heard about the incident from police. He denied the involvement of the accused in BCL politics.

He demanded exemplary punishment to the accused if they are found guilty.

Ghoraghat police station officer-in-charge Mokhlesur Rahman said, police conducted a drive in the area and recovered 30 sacks of cumin from a potato field Tuesday evening.

Huji active

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trying to trace Huji hideouts, Mahmud said: "definitely, we are trying to find out their locations."

Mahmud said Bangladesh was willing to hand over United Liberation Front of Asom leader Anup Chetia, who has been in a Bangladeshi jail since 1996, to India. "We have mutually agreed on the handover; now we have to decide on the formalities of how to handover. It will also include handover of Bangladeshi criminals who have fled to India," he said.

The minister promised a crackdown on militant groups and alleged terrorists in the South Asian region had "cross-border linkages".

A "crackdown will indeed happen because terrorist attacks, which have been happening in the region in the past few months, even in Mumbai, there are cross-border linkages of these terrorists. Not only Lashkar (Lashkar-e-Toiba) and Huji, but other terror organisations also. They (were) trained in Afghanistan, they were in Pakistan (and) then they came here," he said.

Gun-running

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routine checks because of underhand dealings.

Some high police officials in the region, however, admitted the incidence of arms smuggling through the border.

"We often arrest some of them and recover firearms that come from across the border but it is not enough," said a high police official in Jessore on condition of anonymity.

The BDR recovered firearms, ammunition and bomb-making materials smuggled into the country from India in last several days.

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-6 in Jessore recovered seven firearms from different places in the district. Of them, one revolver, one shooter gun, one pipe gun and two bullets from Kainyadah village in Sharsha upazila, on January 25, two American-made pistols, nine bullets and 1 kg bomb-making materials after checking the consignment of a Dhaka-bound passenger bus at Garikhana area on January 26 and one shooter gun, one pipe gun and two bullets from Bezpura area in the town.

Rab said in their initial investigation they confirmed that those were smuggled into the country through the border. Rab however, could not arrest any of the smugglers.

Maj Sarwar, camp-in-charge of Rab-6, told The Daily Star over phone that they have information of criminals involved in arms smuggling across the border in the region.

The BDR on January 31 arrested two arms traffickers and recovered an Indian-made pistol and a shooter gun with seven bullets from Jamalpur village in Daulatpur upazila in Kishida.

Asaduzzaman Miah, acting deputy inspector general of police in Khulna, said over phone that law enforcers are checking the alleged smuggling of firearms throughout the border.

Hillary seeks

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to South Korea and China, was particularly effusive about Indonesia, which she said deserved praise for its hard-won multiethnic democracy and efforts to fight terrorism while respecting human rights.

She tapped Indonesia -- as a democratic and mainly Muslim country -- for a key role in the Obama administration's new commitment to "smart power."

"Building a comprehensive partnership with Indonesia is a critical step on behalf of the United States' commitment to smart power," she told a press conference here alongside Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda.

She said it was important "to listen as well as talk to those around the world, to support a country that has demonstrated so clearly... that Islam, democracy and modernity cannot only coexist but thrive together."

In her first visit to a Muslim country as secretary of state, The US secretary of state said President Barack Obama "wants to reach out to the entire world" and Indonesia would be an important partner in that effort.

She announced plans to restart Peace Corps programmes in Indonesia that were suspended in 1965 when volunteers were expelled after leftists accused them of espionage. And she said the two countries would cooperate on climate change, trade, education, regional security and a host of other issues, while indicating that more development aid was on the way.

While in Jakarta, Hillary intends to announce plans to step up US engagement with Southeast Asia, stressing the growing importance of a region that often felt slighted by the Bush administration.

Her two-day schedule in Indonesia includes a visit to the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) secretariat and she is likely to signal US intent to sign the regional bloc's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. Hillary will also pledge to attend the group's annual foreign ministers meeting in Thailand this year, US officials said.

Development and climate change also will top the agenda during her meetings with Indonesian leaders, along with the Iranian nuclear dispute and the war in Afghanistan.

Indonesia is the world's most populous Islamic nation, and it has personal ties for President Barack Obama, who spent four years of his childhood here. Among those who turned out at the airport to welcome Hillary were 44 children from his former

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elementary school, singing traditional folks songs and waving Indonesian and US flags.

During Clinton's first stop in Japan, her two days of talks focused mostly on North Korea's belligerent rhetoric and threats of a missile test, and on the global financial crisis. After 24 hours in Indonesia, she travels to South Korea and China, where Pyongyang will again likely be a major topic.

But in Tokyo on Tuesday, Hillary previewed the new approach to dialogue she will try out in Southeast Asia. During a town hall student meeting, she said that the United States was under new management.

"America is ready to listen again," she said. "Too often in the recent past, our government has not heard the different perspectives of people around the world. In the Obama administration, we intend to change that."

Later, in response to a student question about the Bush administration's perceived "prejudice" against Muslims in the war on terrorism, Hillary lamented that America's failure to communicate its intentions with the world is "one of the central security challenges we face."

She also acknowledged that the task had gotten harder because of the hugely unpopular war in Iraq, which she supported as a senator, but came to oppose. That conflict, she said, was "viewed as wrongly by many in the world."

"I think that the war on Iraq made our argument more difficult because although they just had peaceful elections, as you know, that they never would have had under Saddam Hussein, the process was extremely controversial," Hillary said.

Mugger kills cop

FROM PAGE 1
were first taken to Bhairab upazila health complex where SI Mizanur and constable Mamun were shifted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital in a critical condition.

Shahjahan Kabir, officer-in-charge of Bhairab police station, said Mizanur and Ruhul caught Mohammad Mamun, a mugger, while he was snatching at Bhairabpur on Dhaka-Sylhet highway at about 6:00pm.

The mugger then stabbed them with a knife and managed to flee, leaving the two policemen injured.

Around 7:00pm, SI Mustafizur and SI Mizanur again caught Mamun and tried to take him to the police station by a motorbike.

The snatcher, who sat between the two SIs on the motorbike, stabbed them indiscriminately with another knife he hid under his clothes, killing Mustafizur on the spot and injuring the other SI critically. The culprit also stabbed constable Mamun and fled from the police custody.

OC Shahjahan said they were trying to arrest him again.

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Chhibber said at a press briefing at Hotel Sonaogon in the city.

He also suggested that Bangladesh should collect information regarding trials of war criminals in different countries. The UNDP will share such information and experience with Bangladesh government, said Chhibber, who is also assistant administrator of United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

"I think the important thing is to collect all the previous experiences on war crimes trial and make it available to Bangladesh government. Such experience we have prepared to share and we will be putting those together to share with the government," he said replying to a question.

The press briefing was also attended by UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Bangladesh Renata Lok Dessallien and UNDP Country Director Stefan Priesner.

Chhibber also dwelt on world economic recession and its impending influence on Bangladesh with the possibility of reduction in export and international donation.