

Lanka accuses aid groups of seeking to prolong war

Army shelling civilians, say Rights group

AP, AFP, Colombo New Delhi

Sri Lanka's military yesterday accused "a vicious coalition" of international aid groups of harbouring terrorists and seeking to prolong the island's civil war for economic gain.

The military has come under increasing international criticism as it pushes to end the decades-old war with the Tamil Tiger rebels, who are pinned in a shrinking war zone in the island's northeast.

Aid groups have accused the military of shelling "no-fire" zones set up to harbour the tens of thousands of civilians trapped by the fighting, a charge the military denies.

The military in a statement posted on the Ministry of Defence Web site, said aid groups operating in Sri Lanka had "hoodwinked" the world and did not want the war to end "to secure their income through a continued

bloodshed."

The statement said the war had "been well engineered and blessed by a vicious coalition of local and international bodies other than the LITE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam)."

Indiscriminate army shelling is killing dozens of civilians every day in a no-fire zone in northern Sri Lanka where Tamil Tiger rebels are staging a last stand, a rights group said yesterday.

"We receive reports of civilians being killed and wounded daily in the no-fire zone, while the Sri Lankan government continues to deny the attacks," said Brad Adams, Asia director at New York-based Human Rights Watch.

The Tamil Tigers' use of civilians as human shields "adds to the bloodshed," Adams said.

Human Rights Watch said as many as

150,000 Tamil civilians remained trapped in the narrow stretch of coastal territory where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been cornered by a massive military offensive.

According to the UN, more than 2,800 civilians may have been killed and more than 7,240 injured in the fighting since January 20.

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay recently warned that both sides in the conflict could be guilty of war crimes and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has urged Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse to halt army shelling.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is the formal name of the rebels.

The only group named in the statement was CARE International, which said last week that one of its local workers was killed in a "no-fire" zone when a shell severed his leg and he was unable to get medical care.

Militants warn Pakistan to stop mobile phone network expansion

AFP, Dera Ismail Khan

Militants yesterday warned the Pakistan government to stop expanding the mobile telephone network in a restive tribal area, worried it could be used to spy on their activities.

They circulated a pamphlet in Wana, the main town of South Waziristan on the Afghan border, telling authorities to stop the network expansion and ordering vendors to stop selling SIM cards, residents and officials said.

"A Jewish, Zionist-backed company is setting up the mobile phone network in Waziristan, which would be used to spy on Taliban activities and drone attacks," said the pamphlet.

"This network is equipped with GPS (global positioning system) and can give the location of a person even if his mobile phone is switched off," it said.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani women hold pictures of their missing relatives outside the Supreme Court building in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistani Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry ordered security services to produce several of the missing in court before he was sacked by military ruler Pervez Musharraf in November 2007.



PHOTO: AFP

Kashmiri women mourn during the funeral of slain Indian Army soldier Shabir Ahmed Malik at Dab Wakoora, Northeast of Srinagar yesterday. An army statement said eight soldiers and 16 rebels have so far died in the fighting in Kupwara district close to the Line of Control that divides the Indian and Pakistani-controlled parts of the Himalayan region.

24 killed in Kashmir forest gunbattles

AFP, Srinagar

Indian troops in revolt-hit Kashmir shot dead five Islamic militants Tuesday, bringing the death toll on both sides from several days of forest gunbattles to 24, the army said.

An army statement said eight soldiers and 16 rebels have died in the fighting in Kupwara district close to the Line of Control that divides the Indian and Pakistani-controlled parts of the Himalayan region.

The gunfights were first reported on Saturday and followed a cross-border firing

incident involving Indian and Pakistani troops that left one Indian soldier injured.

Pakistan and India agreed to a ceasefire along the Line of Control in 2003 and have since held slow-moving peace negotiations.

But the peace process ground to a halt following November's Islamist militant attacks on Mumbai that India has blamed on the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba.

India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars over mainly Muslim Kashmir, which is held in part by each country but claimed in full by both.

Judge's return raises hopes for missing Pakistanis

AP, Islamabad

With Pakistan's top judge back at work, Zahida Sharif has new hope that her husband will be found, her toddler son will know his father and justice will be served.

Abid Sharif is among several hundred Pakistanis who have gone missing believed detained by security agencies since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

The inquiries by Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry into their whereabouts helped prompt former President Pervez Musharraf to sack him in 2007.

The judge's reinstatement last weekend after two years of lawyer-led protests has energized relatives and human rights activists trying to trace the disappeared. Chaudhry returned for his first full day of work Tuesday as supporters showered him with rose petals.

"I just want him to be fair," Zahida Sharif said. "If somebody has done something wrong, he should be brought to the courts. If he has to be punished they can punish him if he has done something wrong. But we should know what's going on."

Many of the missing are believed to have been detained or handed over to the US as part

of anti-terror crackdowns.

Musharraf and officials in his government acknowledged some had been detained, saying it was necessary to combat terrorism. Others, they said, had probably joined militant groups or were fighting or had been killed in Afghanistan.

However, rights workers said many of the missing were non-violent political activists.

Sharif says her husband, a physician who vanished in September 2005 in the north-west city of Peshawar, had no political or militant connections she knew of.

India-US 'move beyond' nuclear row -- for now

Delhi warns Washington on CTBT

AFP, Washington

The United States and India have "moved beyond" bitter differences on nuclear weapons, a senior US official said, but more feuds could be on the horizon as President Barack Obama takes a harder anti-nuclear stance.

The world's two largest democracies both say they are ready for a deeper alliance, eyeing coordination on top priorities for Obama such as battling climate change and bringing stability to Afghanistan.

Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, delivering the Obama administration's first substantive remarks on relations with India, said Monday the United States sought a "third stage of rapprochement."

The two countries had

uneasy relations during the Cold War and later came to loggerheads over India's decision in 1998 to test an atom bomb and gatecrash the elite club of nuclear weapons states.

But relations started warming in the late 1990s. Obama's predecessor George W. Bush later pushed a landmark deal giving India access to civilian nuclear technology despite its refusal to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Steinberg said India and the United States should work together for a "strengthened" NPT. He signalled there was no turning back on Bush's nuclear deal -- criticised by some members of Obama's Democratic Party as sending a bad signal to nation such as Iran accused of pursuing nuclear weapons.

"The agreement not only

provides a concrete platform for economic and technological cooperation between our two countries but also offers a basis for moving beyond one of our most serious barriers to political cooperation -- the status of India's nuclear programme," Steinberg told the Brookings Institution.

He said the United States welcomed Indian input in its new strategy to fight extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan -- a position that could trigger unease in Islamabad, which historically sees New Delhi as the enemy.

Shyam Saran, India's special envoy on nuclear issues, told the same forum that the success pushing through the nuclear deal with the United States gave New Delhi "a welcome sense of vindication."

Robots take centre stage in US war in Afghanistan

ANI, Washington

The US military is deploying the robots to Afghanistan to navigate the country's treacherous terrain.

Called BigDogs, these robots are being deployed in addition to big guns.

The BigDogs - four-legged robots that can navigate the country's treacherous terrain and pilotless helicopters can transport tons of supplies to very remote bases are just two of the new weapons being tested in Afghanistan, reports Fox News.

The machine's creator, Boston Dynamics, has a motto - "dedicated to the way things move" - and that's precisely what is both jarring and fascinating about its invention.

Using a gasoline engine

that emits an eerie lawnmower buzz, BigDog has animal-inspired articulated legs that absorb shock and recycle kinetic energy from one step to the next.

Its robot brain, a sophisticated computer, controls locomotion sensors that adapt rapidly to the environment. The entire control system regulates, steers and navigates ground contact. A laser gyroscope keeps BigDog on his metal paws - even when the robot slips, stumbles or is kicked over.

Boston Dynamics says BigDog can run as fast as 4 miles per hour, walk slowly, lie down and climb slopes up to 35 degrees. BigDog's heightened sense can also survey the surrounding terrain and become alert to potential danger.

500 database

FROM PAGE 16 (UNDP) signed an agreement at Election Commission Secretariat yesterday.

Bangladesh, the Netherlands and the Department for International Development (DFID) are jointly funding the project titled "Construction of Upazila and Regional Server Stations for Electoral Database (CSSED)."

Bangladesh government is financing Tk 110.60 crore while the two development partners are providing Tk 96.10 crore for the implementation of the project to be completed within October 2010.

Netherlands Ambassador Bea ten Tusscher and UNDP Country Director Stefan Priesner signed the agreement on behalf of their sides.

Election Commissioners Muhammed Sohul Hossain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain were present at the signing ceremony.

Talking to newsmen, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said the construction works at the upazila and divisional levels would start simultaneously from the middle of April.

The Public Works Department and the Local Government Engineering Department will implement the construction work in urban and rural areas respectively, he said.

"It would be easier to update the voter list after setting up the server centres," the CEC said.

"I am confident that this project will make a significant contribution to sustain the achievements of Bangladesh Election Commission, including the maintenance of the internationally acclaimed voter list with photo," said Dutch Ambassador Beaten Tusscher.

"This project will strengthen the independence of Bangladesh Election Commission and enable the public to enquire about their voter registration and other electoral matters at the local level," said UNDP Country Director Stefan Priesner.

Power situation

FROM PAGE 16 life miserable but also harming economic activities, and threatening vital irrigation for boro cultivation.

The government however gave priority to power for irrigation and took steps to ensure its supply in the rural areas specially at night -- between 11:00 pm and 6:00 am.

As a temporary and almost insignificant measure to increase gas supplies to power plants, the government also shut down for two weeks the gas-fired Palash Urea Fertiliser Factory and Ghorashal Fertiliser Factory. But this proved futile as the two factories used only 30 mcmcf gas. Half of this gas was diverted to power plants and half to industrial units.

The factories will operate again from the end of this month when the spur-line will be complete.

Initiated as part of a move by Petrobangla and Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL) to overcome problems arising out of various bottlenecks in their gas pipeline system -- the 750-metre long and 12-inch diameter pipeline -- is now ready for commissioning. It will facilitate an approximate 50 percent increase in gas production from Jalalabad field by the end of this year.

Jalalabad field now produces around 150 mcmcf gas.

To commission this spur-line, Operator of Jalalabad field Chevron will have to stop gas production from Jalalabad for three days from Thursday. The process of commissioning will involve shifting the measuring meters currently at Kailastila to Jalalabad.

During these three days of shutdown, gas production from Chevron-operated Bibiyana and Moulvibazar fields will be increased to minimise gas supply shortfall.

"The installation schedule has been fixed to coincide with a national holiday preceding a two-day weekend so that industrial and commercial activities are not affected," said an official.

Koko's case

FROM PAGE 16 while confirming the information yesterday.

ACC Deputy Director Md Abu Sayeed, who lodged the case against Koko with Kafur Police Station on March 17, was appointed its investigation officer (IO) on Monday.

ACC sources said as per the Anti-Corruption Case Act, the IO will get 45 working days to carry out the investigation in the first phase.

If needed, he (IO) will be allowed another 15 working days to complete the investigation, said the sources.

The ACC sued Koko for laundering money he had illegally taken from a Chinese company, Siemens and other sources in exchange for helping them get government contracts.

In the case, the ACC pinpoints Koko's dealings with China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd over a Tk 351 crore contract for constructing the New Mooring Container Terminal and Siemens over a Tk 239 crore contract for supplying and setting up equipment for Teletalk mobile phone company.

A few other persons also gave money to Koko in two of his five Singapore bank accounts detected by the ACC -- four accounts with the United Overseas Bank and the other with the CIC Bank.

Arafat Rahman has illegally sent abroad 28,84,603.15 Singaporean dollars and 9,32,672.81 US dollars to hide his illegally earned money and his illegal source of income has been primarily proven. This is a punishable offence under section 4(2) of the Money Laundering Prevention Act 2009, says the first information report (FIR).

It says Koko illegally earned the money between 2001 and 2006.

Koko, who was arrested along with her mother Khaleda Zia on September 3 in 2007 in connection with a graft case, is now on parole for treatment in Bangkok in Thailand.

Savar ancient site left 'unprotected'

FROM PAGE 1

Animal faeces are in fact dried all over the site. The excavated parts where Buddhists probably practiced traditional art and culture around 1,000 years ago are nearly filled up with people binning garbage every day.

The "Dhobi" also stinks as a poultry farm stands close to it in addition to herds of cattle grazing on the site.

In sheer contrast to the scenario in Bangladesh, movement of people is restricted over a certain number in Ellora and Ajanta in neighbouring India to avoid noise pollution and damage to archaeological sites, which have buffer zones for protection.

"This is most unfortunate and very dangerous for our national heritage. The scenario is almost same in all the heritage sites across the country," said Asiatic Society of Bangladesh President Prof Sirajul Islam.

"We have been neglecting our heritage over the years. We are dealing with our heritage in such a way that it won't survive much long," he added.

Noted historian Prof Abdul Momin Chowdhury suggests that a board of experts from multiple disciplines might be formed to deal with the declining archaeological sites. He said, "The ministry did not care much in this regard and caused severe degeneration to our antiquities."

"Rejuvenation and upgrade of the archaeology department is a must as it lacks skilled human resources and adequate funds. What is done is done but degeneration of the antiquities shouldn't be allowed anymore," he added.

"It's very sad. The government must bring an immediate end to its negligence in dealing with antiquities. If the archaeology department has resources and fund crisis then the problem must be addressed immediately," observed Prof Sirajul Islam.

Only a 15-minute rickshaw ride from the "Dhobi" leads to yet another sad tale of Bangladesh archaeology. Rajashan, another protected site measuring five acres and 17 decimals, has entirely been encroached.

Despite a court order in 2003 to have the site in possession, the archaeology department lost its possession of the site as an individual named Shajahan, nephew of local ward commissioner Quader, is using it as personal property.

The Daily Star tried several days but found no-one at the archaeology department who is entrusted to look after these sites.

Instead, everyone said they were not responsible for the job. The officials were found even ignorant about the matters and reluctant to know anything about the sites' present status.

A guard from the department has been employed to look after the sites, but it's simply impossible for him, especially when his bosses turn a blind eye.

Contacted, Director General in-charge of archaeology department Abdul Khaleque said: "I can't accept allegations of negligence by the department in conservation, preservation and restoration immediately. It has to be checked and requires debates and discus-

sions in determining whether any wrong was done in carrying out the job."

He denied commenting on specific allegations of neglect in Panam in Sonargaon, Shat Gambuz Mosque and Harishchandra Rajar Dhibi until he goes through necessary documents.

The previous DG, Shafiqul Alam, who has recently gone on LPR, said, "In reality the place is not in our possession. We informed the local administration, police and UNO several times but they did not help us. The department does not have enough manpower to keep the place secured."

"Who will take the responsibility for the loss? These are our priceless property. If the sites are lost the government must be held accountable," said Prof Shah Sufi Mustafizur Rahman of archaeology department, Jahangirnagar University.

"An extensive and intensive survey to identify the archaeological sites of Bangladesh is a must, otherwise there will be no records of the sites one day," he added.

STATUS OF RAJASHAN Shajahan has built a one-storey building on the site. He earns Tk 700 to Tk 1,200 from each of the 25 rooms in rent. He also owns five groceries there, while his family members long ago sold a part of the site.

Moreover, he has also built a luxurious two-storey building on the 'protected' archaeological site.

He has 'allowed' some of his followers on the land to encroach the entire site. Recently he 'permitted' a man to set up a rickshaw garage there

for a monthly payment of Tk 500.

Speaking defiantly, Shahjahan's wife claimed they have court order and have seen so many journalists and newspaper reports that they don't bother about the media any more.

Shahjahan admitted to constructing establishments on the land but denied making further comments.

Locals allege Shahjahan regularly bribe some archaeology department officials so that the matter gathers dust. The Department, on the other hand, pins the blame on the local administration including the UNO and the municipality chairman for their failure to evict the encroachers.

Shahjahan began grabbing the land by filing a case claiming the land to be his ancestral property.

In response, a Dhaka court in June 2003 directed the archaeology department to acquire the land. Shahjahan appealed to the High Court in July and the court asked the department for necessary papers.

The HC also sought papers from the Dhaka court and the papers took four years to be sent to HC. No hearing was held on the appeal as the Department did not take any measures in this regard.

Marksman Shah Alam, responsible to revive the case, said, "I do not know the present status of the case. I went to the High Court two months ago and learned no date is declared to hold hearing on the appeal."

He mentioned that they have informed the police, UNO

office and even joint forces in vain. The Department also filed a general diary with Savar police on June 15, 2005 regarding the matter.

"I cannot say anything about it as I don't know much," said Field Officer Abul Bashar, another official involved with the site.

Contacted, Regional Director Abdul Khaleque could not recognise the protected Rajashan site and denied to comment saying he was busy with an enquiry.

SITE HISTORY

Savar occupies an important place in the early medieval history of Bangladesh. Harendra Nath Ghosh conducted an excavation here for the first time in 1913 and 1915. The British Raj announced the palace of King Harishchandra a protected archaeological site in 1920, according to a journal published by the archaeology department, Jahangirnagar University in 2004.

Antiquities recovered from the site include turquoise blue glazed ware, silver coin, brick, bronze materials, Stupa and Vihara and inscription.

A research by JU found 65 archaeological sites in the area. Eight were discovered earlier and the rest by the university teams. The discovery of Stupa and Vihara establishments the place as a Buddhist seat during the early medieval period.

The Buddhist sculptures found at several places in the country include Lalmai and Maynamati in Comilla, Paharpur in Naogaon and Mahastangarh in Bogra.

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