



UN humanitarian chief John Holmes is talking to internally displaced Tamil civilians in a government camp in Vavuniya, northern Sri Lanka yesterday. Having escaped the nightmare of Sri Lanka's war zone, tens of thousands of Tamil civilians find themselves stuck in military-run camps, stalked by deprivation and deep anxiety about their future.

## Indian SC orders probe into role of Modi, 63 others in Gujarat riots

ANI, New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the role of 64 people, including that of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in the post-Godhra riots cases.

The apex court order was passed in response to a petition filed by Congress parliamentary member Ehsaan Jaffery.

The court asked the SIT to submit the report within three months.

The order came over two months after Gujarat High Court judge A. S. Dave declined to hear a SIT petition that challenged the anticipatory bail granted to State Minister Maya Kodnani and the former VHP leader Jaydeep Patel in connection with the Godhra case.

"Not before me. The case will now be transferred to the

court of another judge and the date of hearing would be decided later," Justice Dave said without giving any reason. The SIT had moved the Gujarat High Court and challenged the anticipatory bail granted by a lower court to Kodnani and Patel, in the post-Godhra and Naroda Gam riot cases.

The Supreme Court had constituted a five-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to re-investigate the post-Godhra communal riots.

The SIT is reinvestigating into nine post-Godhra riot cases and was expected to submit its report to Supreme Court by February 15.

Several prominent leaders like, Maya Kodnani of BJP and Jaydeep Patel of Vishwa Hindu Parishad are at the centre of investigation, following many witnesses naming them in their statements in the Naroda Gam riot case.

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## Insurgents gun down 10 people in Thailand

AP, Pattani

Suspected Muslim insurgents killed ten civilians in a flurry of attacks in the insurgency-plagued southern Thailand, the army said yesterday, the fifth anniversary of a bloody assault by security forces against militants at a mosque.

In the deadliest incident, at least six gunmen in a pickup truck stormed into a house in Yala province late Monday, opening fire on a Muslim family of five, army spokesman Col. Parinya Chaidilok said. Four people were killed.

Parinya says two Muslim rubber plantation workers were later found dead in the compound of a nearby mosque. Thai security officials blamed Islamic insurgents bent on stirring up communal tension between Buddhists and Muslims.

Hong Kong said it was testing four people as queues formed outside pharmacies with residents, spurred by

## Asia tightens grip against flu threat

AFP, Hong Kong

Asia tightened its already strict measures to keep swine flu from spreading across the region yesterday, after the World Health Organisation warned of a significant increase in the risk of a pandemic.

New Zealand confirmed three cases among 11 who are assumed to have caught the virus as the number of suspected infections across the region jumped.

Australia said it was probing 70 possible infections among those who had recently returned from Mexico or the United States. South Korea reported a single case and Thai medical authorities placed a woman in quarantine in hospital for tests.

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# Lanka snubs Sweden FM as tension over war mounts

Colombo blocking access to civilians in war-zone: UN

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka barred Sweden's foreign minister yesterday from entering the island on a humanitarian mission, as diplomatic tensions mounted over the conduct of the war on the Tamil Tigers.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt had been due to travel to the war-torn country this week to press demands for aid workers to be given full access to civilians trapped by heavy fighting between government troops and the rebels.

But a Sri Lankan foreign ministry official indicated that Colombo felt it had already done enough by allowing Britain and France's top diplomats -- David Miliband and Bernard Kouchner -- to visit Wednesday.

"The Swedish minister also wanted to jump on that bandwagon and we said no," the official said.

"Some think they can land up at our airport and expect a red carpet treatment. We are not a colony and neither a bankrupt Third World country. Our main donors are in Asia, not in Europe," the

official added.

Bildt described the snub as "exceedingly strange behaviour," and said he was recalling the Swedish ambassador to Colombo.

The row came a day after the United Nations' humanitarian chief John Holmes also saw his requests for greater humanitarian access turned down, despite mounting international concern over civilian casualties.

Sri Lanka is refusing humanitarian access to its war zone where some 50,000 people are believed trapped, a top UN diplomat said on Monday, while welcoming a government move to slow down its military offensive.

The UN's humanitarian chief John Holmes failed to secure agreement with President Mahinda Rajapakse in talks here Monday to send a humanitarian mission to the shrinking conflict area on the island's northeast coast.

"We don't have agreement on this," Holmes told reporters here after talks with Rajapakse, referring to a request by United Nations Secretary-General Ban

Ki-moon to get a UN team to the conflict area. "I am disappointed about this."

Colombo has said security conditions would not allow aid workers into the area, even though the government on Monday announced that all "combat operations have reached their conclusion."

A UN document circulated among diplomats in Colombo last week said as many as 6,500 civilians may have been killed and another 14,000 wounded in the government's offensive against the separatist rebels so far this year.

The UN also estimates that some 50,000 non-combatants are still trapped in the conflict area, and the world body's rights chief has said both sides in the long-running ethnic war may be guilty of war crimes.

The government maintains that the number of trapped civilians is fewer than 20,000, and accuses the outnumbered and encircled rebels of using them as human shields.

President Mahinda Rajapakse pledged Monday that air strikes and attacks using heavy-calibre weapons would stop.



A family from Hong Kong wearing facemasks as a precaution against the deadly swine flu arrive at Sydney International Airport yesterday. Swine flu has created a "perfect storm" for an Australian tourism industry already reeling from the global recession and facing its worst downturn in 20 years, experts say.



British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (L) speaks with Pakistani former premier Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad on Monday. Brown held talks in Pakistan after announcing a new strategy to tackle a "cruelty of terrorism" on a visit to Kabul.

## US drone attacks counterproductive Sharif tells Brown

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan Muslim League-N chief Nawaz Sharif has urged British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to use his influence to make the US shun its policy of drone strikes in the tribal areas.

The appeal came at a meeting between Sharif and Brown who had called on the PML-N chief at Punjab House.

At the 40-minute meeting, the two leaders exchanged views on several issues of mutual interest.

Sharif said that the drone

attacks were compounding anti-American sentiments in Pakistan, and such strikes would be counter-productive in the long run.

He said that the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis were opposed to extremism and militancy.

"The prevailing problems in Pakistan need to be seen in the context of the long years of military rule and denial to the people of their fundamental democratic rights," The Daily Times quoted Sharif, as saying.

Sharif said that the drone

## Brown touts anti-terror strategy in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown held talks in Pakistan Monday after announcing a new strategy to tackle a "cruelty of terrorism" on a visit to Kabul.

Brown met with Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari to discuss terror threats after visiting British troops in insurgency-plagued southern Afghanistan and meeting

Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Kabul.

"These border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan are the breeding ground, the crucible of terrorism," Brown told a news conference with Karzai.

"A chain of terror links these areas to the streets of many of the capital cities of the world," Brown added.

"We wish to support the Pakistani authorities... in

dealing with that terrorist threat and we will be discussing later today how we can work together... when I meet President Zardari in Pakistan," he said.

The strategy announcement follows growing concern in the West over Taliban advances in Pakistan, which Washington has put at the heart of the fight against al-Qaeda, and potential implications for the war in Afghanistan.

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