

# Top Tamil ally urges Tigers to surrender

Lanka rejects satellite evidence of civilian bombings

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's top Tamil political force appealed Saturday for a way for cornered Tiger rebels to surrender to a third party and save tens of thousands of civilians trapped in the war zone.

The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a pro-government party, urged President Mahinda Rajapakse to name an international agency to which the Tamil Tiger guerrillas could hand over their weapons in exchange for an amnesty.

The call came as government forces were poised for a final assault on a small patch

of coastline into which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are hemmed in the island's northeast.

Sri Lanka's defence ministry yesterday rejected satellite imagery issued by the United Nations in support of allegations that security forces shelled a civilian area.

The defence ministry said the allegations based on UN aerial images posted on the UNOSAT website and used on several foreign television channels had "no scientific validity" unless there was verification on the ground.

"Conclusions drawn from the interpretations of these images have no scientific

validity," the ministry said, responding to reports the military had shelled an area the government itself had designated a no-fire zone.

The pictures showed craters which were formed inside the zone between February 15 and April 19, the day before the army breached the Tigers' defences and civilians started to pour out.

"The imagery is fairly clear and shows the time, so anybody can study and compare them," head of the mapping unit at UNOSAT, Einer Bjorge, told Al Jazeera. He said the pattern of the craters would have required air power.

Sri Lanka has consistently

denied it used heavy weapons against civilian populated areas and last week announced it had ordered security forces not to use heavy calibre weapons and aerial strikes.

The United Nations estimates some 50,000 people are also trapped by the fighting and risk getting killed. International calls for a truce to allow the civilians out have been rejected by Colombo.

"I suggest that an international agency, acceptable to the government, be selected to visit (the rebel-held area of) Wanni and persuade the LTTE to allow the innocent people to go out freely," TULF leader V. Anandasangari said.



Pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website picture shows people killed at a make-shift hospital at Mullivaikal in the Mullaitivu district in the last remaining patch of land still in the hands of Tamil Tiger rebels. Tamilnet.com accused the military of killing 64 civilians in the attack, but the military denied hitting the area and in turn said it could have been a misfire of the rebels themselves.

## Fast-track courts to handle Gujarat riot cases

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court Friday ordered the setting up of special fast-track courts to handle a backlog of cases relating to the mass murder of Muslims in Gujarat state in 2002, a report said.

The Gujarat administration has long been accused of dragging its feet in dealing with the pogrom, which saw Hindu extremists kill some 2,000 Muslims.

Gujarat's state government is at the centre of the riots case, with its Hindu nationalist chief minister Narendra Modi fending off allegations that he either instigated or turned a blind eye to the massacres.



Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari (L) meets with Shukri Ghanem, chairman of Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC), in Tripoli yesterday. Zardari, who arrived late on April 30 as the head of a large delegation, is on a three-day visit to the oil-rich North African country and his first to Libya since he became president in September 2008.

## 'Swat deal to be reviewed if peace doesn't return'

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lahore

A controversial deal with the Taliban in Pakistan's restive northwest would be reviewed if the militants don't live up to their end of the bargain and peace doesn't return to the area, Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani said Saturday.

"If agreement is not honoured by the other side and peace remains elusive, we would revisit and review the deal," Gilani told reporters here.

"We would reconsider the deal," he added for good

measure.

The deal has been tottering ever since the military Sunday moved into action against the Taliban, first in the Lower Dir district of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and then in the Buner district that is just 100 km from Islamabad.

Under the Feb 16 deal between Taliban-backed radical cleric Sufi Mohammad and the NWFP government, Sharia laws would be imposed in the Malakand division of the province - that includes Swat, Buner and Lower Dir - in return for the militants laying down their arms.

## Voters reject all candidates in Madhya Pradesh

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Bhopal

Over 4,000 voters left polling booths without casting their ballots since they did not want to support any of the candidates in the two-phase parliamentary election in Madhya Pradesh, an official said here Saturday.

While 1,473 voters rejected all candidates in the first phase of polling April 23, the number of such voters in the second phase stood at 2,608, Madhya Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer J.S. Mathur told IANS.

These voters came to the polling booths, got their names registered and then left without exercising their franchise.

## US rules out sending troops to Pakistan for fighting Taliban

ANI, Washington/Karachi

The United States has ruled out sending troops to Pakistan to lend support to the country's ongoing military offensive against the Taliban and other extremists groups in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

US Senator and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee John Kerry has made it clear that Washington would not send its troops on Pakistani soil.

Kerry said America can however, send troops for training, if Pakistan desires so.

"We're not going to send troops by any significant

numbers of any kind to Pakistan. We may have some people training or helping if that's something they decide they want," The News quoted Kerry, as saying.

He also asked Islamabad to develop an indigenous strategy to counter the 'existential' threat that the country is presently facing.

"It can't be an American-driven policy. It can't have an American imprint or footprint. This really has to be home-grown and that's what we're really working with Pakistanis to achieve," Kerry said.

He added that Pakistan will have to show strength against

the extremists to assert their democratic values, and assure the international community that it has the will to root out the problem which is posing danger not only to the country, but also to the entire region including the United States and Europe.

Meanwhile, a majority of Pakistani civilians are of the view that the presence of allied forces led by the United States poses a bigger threat to them rather than the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

According to an annual assessment report of Pakistan issued by an US think tank, Centre for American Progress, more Pakistanis consider US presence in Asia as a threat to their country.

## India, Pakistan were close to an accord

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Saturday said he was close to clinching 'an agreement' on all bilateral issues with then Pakistan military president Pervez Musharraf two years ago but the judiciary in that country halted that process.

"I and General (ret'd) Musharraf had reached an agreement in non-territorial solution to all problems but

then General Musharraf got into difficulties with the chief justice (Iftikhar Chowdhary)... He said we cannot operate on all fronts and therefore the whole process came to a halt..." Manmohan Singh told GNN-IBN in an interview.

He was referring to Pakistan lawyers' country-wide protests in 2007, which ultimately led to the president Musharraf's downfall. Musharraf stepped down from the post in 2008 after democratically elected government was sworn in.

## Defeat the Left Front Rahul urges West Bengal voters

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Baharampur

Speaking in the Communist bastion of West Bengal, Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi Saturday asked people not to vote for the Left Front and said it only indulges in big talk but does little for the poor.

"The Communist government here does not work for the poor, tribals and backward classes. They always indulge in tall talk but when it comes to implementation, they just do nothing," he said at a rally here during his second campaign visit to the state for the Lok Sabha elections.

"The people of West Bengal will have to think and take their decision. It's incumbent

on them which government they will choose at the centre. They also have to bring change, defeating the ruling Left Front government in the state."

Rahul Gandhi also accused the Communist government of not implementing the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and failing to work for the development of the poor.

"I used to think the Communist government here works for the betterment of backward sections. But I am surprised to see the real situation," he said, adding: "They can only criticise the policies formulated by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the centre."

## Myanmar still endures Nargis ravages

AFP, Bangkok

Hundreds of thousands of people are living without adequate food and shelter in Myanmar a year after a deadly cyclone ravaged large swathes of the country, the UN and aid

agencies said Saturday.

They said a fifth of those whose homes were destroyed by Cyclone Nargis on May 2-3 last year were still living under tarpaulin, while at least 250,000 people would require food handouts until the end of 2009 at the earliest.

"Considerable needs remain," said the United Nations in a statement, as it sought 691 million dollars to fund another three years of assistance.

"Continued support and engagement by the international community must be ensured for years to come," said UN Resident Coordinator Bishow Parajuli.

Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar on the afternoon of May 2 with wind speeds reaching 240 kilometres (150 miles) an hour and storm surges up to four metres high.



Indian villagers inspect a mangled vehicle the day after a landmine blast by suspected Maoists at Jamboni some 210 km west of Kolkata on Friday. Two persons were killed when suspected Maoists triggered a landmine blast on a convoy of three vehicles ferrying election personnel after third phase polling in the evening of April 30.

## Helicopter sabotage targets Anil Ambani

AP, New Delhi

Anil Ambani does not wait in traffic.

The billionaire industrialist often commutes by helicopter, soaring far above the traffic jams that clog his sprawling hometown of Mumbai.

But Ambani's high-flying life could have ended last week. A complaint filed with police said pebbles and gravel were found in the chopper's engine debris that could have caused the craft to crash.

The case took a bizarre twist this week: the technician who discovered the suspected sabotage turned up dead.

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