



PHOTO: AFP

Handout combo of screen grabs taken off video provided by Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka and shot in January 2009 allegedly shows a Sri Lankan government soldier executing a prisoner during the final phase of the Sri Lankan government's battle against Tamil Tiger rebels. Independent experts have concluded that the video footage on execution of prisoners last year was authentic, a UN envoy said on Thursday.

## Lanka under pressure on war crimes

### Execution video authentic, says UN envoy

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka was under new pressure yesterday to submit to a war crimes investigation after the United Nations authenticated a video allegedly showing prisoners being executed by troops last year.

The government in Colombo has faced repeated calls for a probe from Western countries and rights groups ever since it launched a final offensive to crush Tamil Tiger separatist rebels in the country's northeast in early 2009.

The assault brought an end to a 37-year-old ethnic conflict that had claimed 100,000 lives since 1972, but hurt the reputation of the country abroad amid criticism of the conduct and tactics of government forces.

The UN estimates that 7,000 civilians perished during the first four months of last year, though this figure is disputed by the government.

On Thursday, UN human rights envoy Philip Alston concluded that video footage said to be of Sri

Lankan troops executing unarmed Tamil Tiger rebels last year was authentic and urged Colombo to accept a war crimes probe.

Reacting on Friday, Sri Lankan Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe again dismissed the video as a fraud and accused Alston of leading a personal crusade against the country.

"Philip Alston is on a crusade of his own to force an international (war crimes) inquiry against Sri Lanka," Samarasinghe told AFP. "We object to the procedure he followed. He should have shared his information with us first."

He added: "As far as we are concerned, the video is not genuine and it has been doctored."

Sri Lanka has always resisted calls to probe its rights record, arguing that there are no grounds for an investigation given that there were no civilian casualties or extrajudicial killings.

In May last year, Colombo managed to stave off a resolution condemning it at the UN Human Rights

Council thanks to the backing of China.

But new charges emerged last month when the former army chief, Sarath Fonseka, alleged that troops had been ordered by a top defence official to execute surrendering rebels, a charge the government vehemently denies.

The government accused Fonseka, who is challenging President Mahinda Rajapakse in the January 26 national election, of "betraying" the country and making the statement for political gain.

Three Tiger political wing leaders who were arranging their surrender with UN assistance were shot dead on May 17, according to official reports. The government maintained that they were killed by the guerrillas themselves.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said, through his spokesman Martin Nesirky in New York, that "a full and impartial investigation into allegations of human rights is critical if we are to confront impunity" and bring justice.

## Zardari gives go-ahead to Pak Army to launch air strikes against Taliban

### US drone attacks 'undermine support for war'

ANI, AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has allowed the country's military to carry out airstrikes on the identified Taliban havens located in the intricate mountain terrains in Tribal Areas.

During his meeting with Pakistani Army Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani on Thursday, Zardari, in his capacity as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, approved the coordinated efforts of the armed forces against militants.

"Matters related to operational preparedness of Pakistan Army, security situation and the ongoing drive against militancy and extremism came under discussion," The Nation quoted a statement released after the meeting, as saying.

Earlier, Kayani briefed Zardari about the operational decisions taken during the meeting of high command of the Pakistan Army on Thursday, wherein the Air Chief was also present.

Kayani also told Zardari about the situation arising after a recent statement by the Indian army chief about the Indian potential to confront both Pakistan and China at the same time.

Sources said Zardari was also briefed about the decisions at the cabinet committee of defence under Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani about the maintenance of minimum

deterrence.

Meanwhile, Zardari has reiterated the demand for transfer of US drone technology to Pakistan so that Islamabad could itself hit high value targets in its Tribal Areas.

"Persuade the US policymakers to give drone technology to Pakistan so that militant could be targeted by Pakistani security forces themselves rather than foreign troops which raise the question of sovereignty," The Dawn quoted Zardari, as saying during his meeting with US Senator John McCain.

Zardari told McCain that drone attacks inside the Pakistani territory had undermined the national consensus on the war on terror.

McCain in response reportedly said that US authorities had been making a strategy to reduce chances of collateral damage by drones. McCain has insisted that drone strikes against insurgents in Pakistan's tribal areas is an effective part of the US anti-terrorism strategy, and it should continue.

"The drone strikes are part of an overall set of tactics which make up the strategy for victory and they have been very effective," The Dawn quoted McCain, as saying during a brief trip to Afghanistan.

His comments come in the wake of al-Qaeda's claim that the assassination of seven CIA agents in Afghanistan's Khost province was to avenge drone strikes that have killed prominent militants.

## Pakistan nets top Taliban leader

PTI, Islamabad

In a major catch, police arrested the deputy chief of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan from here and seized an explosives-laden vehicle that he was planning to use for a terrorist attack, officials said today.

The suspect, Israr Amin, was arrested in Pakistan Town area of Islamabad by a team comprising police and intelligence sleuths late last night. Police were tipped off about the Taliban commander by another suspect.

Amin, a resident of Hangu district in the North West Frontier Province, had been living in a rented accommodation in the capital for the past two months.

## I do not need favour of foreign powers: Karzai

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai, whose fragile government is propped up by more than 100,000 foreign troops, said yesterday he does not need "the favour" of the international community.

The US and Nato have 113,000 troops fighting a Taliban insurgency trying to topple Karzai and destabilise the war-torn, impoverished and corrupt country.

With more than 500 international troop deaths in 2009, the war is becoming more deadly for foreign and Afghan troops alike as it drags into its ninth year since the Islamic regime was toppled in 2001.

Diplomats in Kabul say without the Western military presence, Karzai's govern-

ment would soon collapse as the Taliban is spreading its footprint across the country and setting up shadow administrative and judicial systems.

While being propped up by Western forces, set to rise this year to 150,000, and billions of dollars in annual aid, Karzai told Al-Jazeera Television his job is "to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people".

"I have to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, I have to legitimize and have the trust of the Afghan people if I am to be a good president," Karzai said.

"The legitimacy of my government has to be given by the Afghan people.

"With the international community, I don't have to have their favour. They are here for a purpose, which is

the fight on terror, and we are working with them for a purpose, which is the stability and safety of Afghanistan, so we have a common purpose."

Karzai began a second five-year term in November after being declared the winner of an August presidential poll that descended into a ballot-stuffing farce, with investigators finding that about a million votes for Karzai were fake.

In the interview, he said Afghanistan is "a good model" of democracy and has "done well" in education and economy -- despite the fact that millions of children do not go to school, extremists' intimidation limits girls' education and the economy is based principally on the illegal poppy trade.

## Indian railways 'fires' Ulfa leader after 30 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Top leader of United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) Paresh Baruah, who is on the run from law for more than two decades, has been sacked as an employee of Indian Railways.

The Railways issued the dismissal notice to Baruah, who heads the armed wing of Ulfa, on December 31, railway sources said here yesterday.

Baruah had joined the Railways as a traffic porter in 1978 and went underground a few months later by joining the insurgent group Ulfa. He had been absent from duty for over 30 years.

The sacking of the Ulfa leader followed an inquiry into his absence from duty.

Baruah was an employee of the Railways in Tinsukia railway station of Assam before he plunged into insurgency.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan policemen stand amid debris of a collapsed house following an explosion in Karachi yesterday. An explosion flattened a house being used by militants in Pakistan's financial capital on Friday with eight people killed when bomb-making materials detonated accidentally, police said.

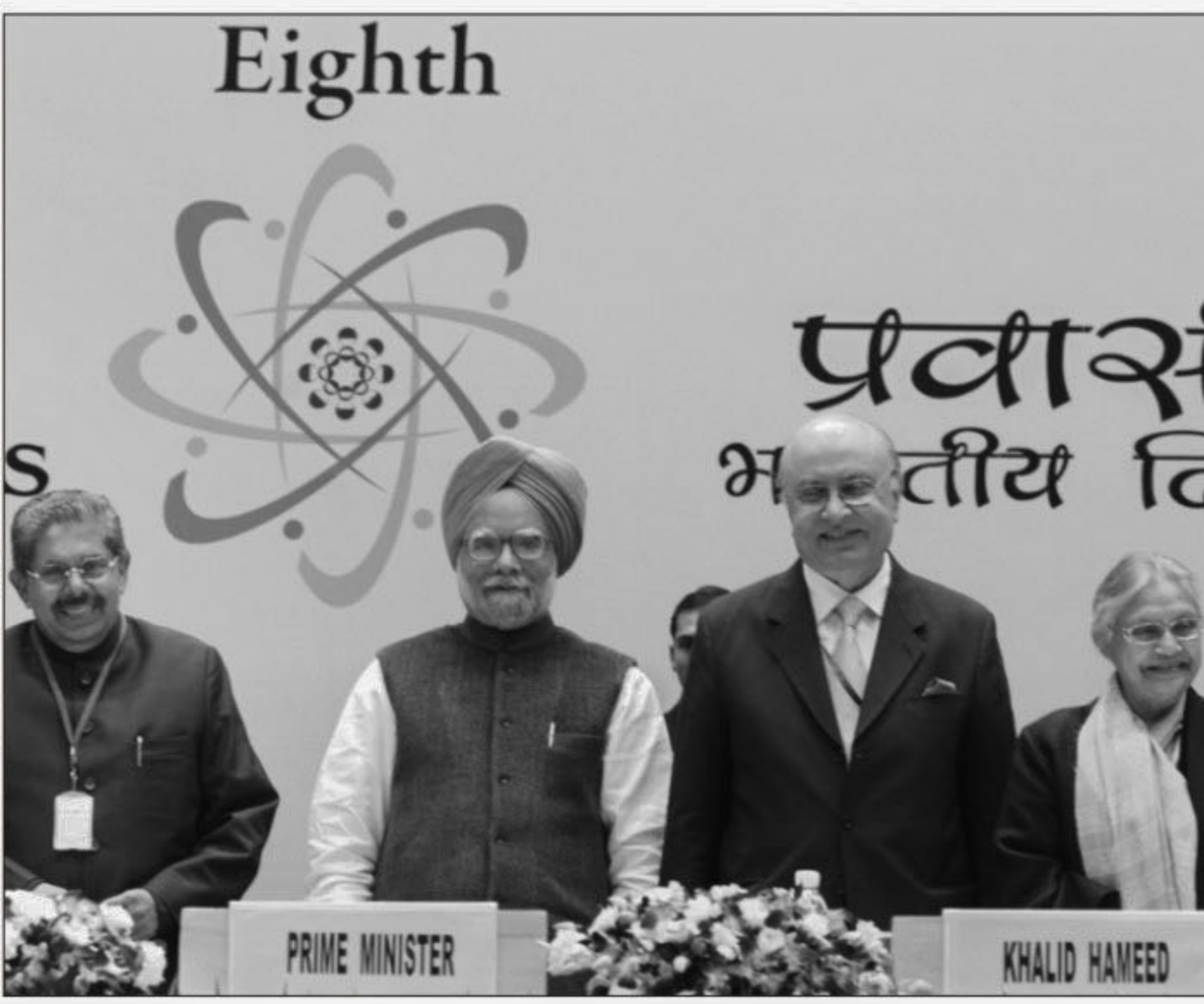


PHOTO: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2nd L), Lord Khalid Hameed CBE DL Hampstead (2nd R), Indian Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi (L) and Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit attend the opening ceremony of the Eighth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2010 (Overseas Indian Conference) in New Delhi yesterday.

## NRIs may be given opportunity to vote in election: Manmohan

ANI, New Delhi

Inaugurating the eighth edition of the 'Pravasi Bharatiya Divas', Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) may soon vote in the elections and the process may start as early as the next general elections.

Dr Singh said, "It gives me very great pleasure to join you at the inauguration of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2010. Every year on this day we celebrate and honour the contribution of the overseas Indians in making for the development of their spiritual and ancestral home. We are immensely proud of the achievements of our diaspora."

"Your achievements have made a great contribution in changing the image of India to the world at large. Let me therefore join Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs and the Chief Minister of Delhi to welcome you to New Delhi and wish you a very happy New Year," he added.

Dr Singh further said, "This year we have the great honour and privilege of having the distinguished Lord Khalid Hameed as our Chief Guest. Lord Khalid Hameed epitomizes the spirit of the global Indian. He is not only a very distinguished professional and entrepreneur in the field of medicine and healthcare but he is also an active leader in community services, including most importantly those that promote inter-faith harmony."

"Yesterday, we held the first meeting of the Prime Minister's Global Advisory Council of Overseas Indians. Some of the best and brightest men and women working in different parts of the world in various fields happen to be people of Indian origin."

## Myanmar court sentences two to death for secret leak

AFP, Yangon

A court in military-ruled Myanmar has sentenced two officials to death for leaking information, sources said Friday, in a case reportedly involving secret ties between the ruling junta and North Korea.

The men, along with a third who was jailed for 15 years, were arrested last year after details and photos about a trip to nuclear-armed North Korea by the Myanmar regime's third-in-command were leaked to exited media, reports said.

"Two officials got the death sentence and another one was jailed for 15 years for leaking information. They were sentenced at the special court in Insein Prison on Thursday," an official source said on condition of anonymity.

The two condemned men were retired army major Win Naing Kyaw and foreign ministry official Thura Kyaw, while the man given a 15-year sentence was Pyan Sein, also a foreign ministry employee, the official sources said.

## Pakistan needs to do more against terror

Says Krishna

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Noting that Pakistan had taken 'positive measures' to the book the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, India yesterday asked Islamabad to take 'effective steps' against the scourge of terrorism.

"After the 26/11 attacks, Pakistan has taken positive measures on the basis of the dossiers we have provided. However, we are still to see Pakistan take effective steps to end infiltration and dismantle the terror mechanism on its territory," External Affairs Minister SM Krishna said in his address at the second plenary of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, India's annual connect with its diaspora, here.

"We support a stable Pakistan at peace with itself. We wish to address the issues between us through dialogue. But we have made it clear that this would be possible only in an atmosphere free of terror," the minister added.

Turning to India's other neighbours, Krishna noted that peace prevailed in Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

"As for India and China, there is space for both of us to grow and meet our people's aspirations. China is now India's largest trading partner but there are also important bilateral issues that cannot be wished away," he said, stressing on the "the maintenance of peace and tranquillity."

Speaking about the big two, Russia and the US, Krishna said "time tested ties" with Moscow had been "given a fresh impetus in areas like nuclear energy, space and defence. With the US, we are building on the positive momentum that has developed over the last few years".

## Cong top brass meets on Telangana issue

PTI, ANI, New Delhi

Congress top brass this evening deliberated on the issue of Telangana in the backdrop of government's move to constitute a mechanism for wide ranging consultations with various groups and stakeholders on the issue.

Congress President Sonia Gandhi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Home Minister P Chidambaram, Law Minister Veerappa Moily and Political Secretary to Congress President Ahmed Patel attended the brief meeting.

This is the first meeting after Chidambaram held consultations with eight recognised political parties of Andhra Pradesh on the creation of a separate state.

The Core Group took stock of the deliberations of the meeting Chidambaram had with leaders of political parties and his meetings with state leaders in the last two days.

The party and the government are said to be weighing various pros and cons on the mechanism and the implications it would have on the dialogue process.

Earlier on Thursday, Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) chief K Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR), who is leading the Telangana cause met Antony and discussed the issue.

The Congress Core Committee will on Friday take into account all the earlier discussions held on the issue including the meeting that was convened by Chidambaram on Tuesday, where he had a meeting with the leaders of eight Andhra Pradesh political parties and discussed the issue.

## 2 ex-Blackwater staff charged with Afghan murders

AFP, Washington

Two former Blackwater employees have been arrested and charged with the murder of two Afghans in Kabul last year and could face the death penalty, the US Justice Department has said.

Justin Cannon, 27, of Corpus Christi, Texas, and Christopher Drotteff, 29, of Virginia Beach, Virginia, were arrested Thursday and charged with second-degree murder following the shooting deaths of the two Afghan men.

They were also charged with attempted murder, after a third man was wounded in the Kabul incident on May 5, when Cannon and Drotteff were working as contractors for the US military in Afghanistan.



PHOTO: AFP

Former US presidential candidate and Republican Senator John McCain (L) and Senator Joseph Lieberman leave after a press conference in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistan warned US senators on Thursday that American drone attacks against militants on its territory undermined "the national consensus" that supported the war against militancy.

## Two die in Kashmir gunbattle

AFP, Srinagar

Indian troops killed two suspected militants in Kashmir yesterday, a day after a nearly 24-hour siege at a hotel that left four people dead, police said.

One of the militants killed in Friday's gunbattle was involved in a car bombing last year near the region's main jail in the Indian Kashmiri summer capital of Srinagar that killed four people, police said.

"He was also involved in killing two policemen in a separate attack," a police spokesman said, without naming the rebels.

The two -- both from the hardline pro-Pakistan group Lashkar-e-Toiba, according to police -- were killed during a gunbattle in Andrusa village, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Srinagar.

## Kasuri blames PPP govt for failing to keep good relations with India

ANI, Lahore

Former Pakistan minister Khurshheed Mahmood Kasuri has slammed the PPP-led Government for failing to maintain ties with India - even at the level left by the Pervez Musharraf regime.

The Dawn quoted Kasuri, as saying that the Sir Creek dispute was on the verge of being signed during his tenure as foreign minister from 2002 to 2007, but the progress over the issue got stalled after the formation of the new government.

Kasuri said he regretted that the "inept" PPP government could not properly deal with the South Asian neighbour and worsened the ties.

He claimed that direct trade with New Delhi had increased to two billion dollars from 20 million dollars when he was looking after foreign affairs.

On the human rights issue, he said both the states were putting up the cases of each other's citizens being as prisoners for minor crimes before the judiciary for finding ways to release them.

Similarly, he said, people-to-people contacts were so strong that during cricket matches Pakistani fans would carry Indian flags and vice versa.

Rejecting the claim that last year's Mumbai terror attacks worsened Indo-Pak relations, he said there had been a terror attack on Samjhota Express but ties between the two countries never suffered this much.