



S Lanka accuses ex-peace envoy of aiding rebels

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president has accused a former top Norwegian envoy of covertly financing the island's separatist Tamil Tigers during peace talks before a military campaign that crushed the rebels in 2009.

President Mahinda Rajapakse told a public rally on Saturday that he wanted Oslo to probe the role of Erik Solheim, a former Norwegian international development minister and a peace envoy to Sri Lanka.

"The Norwegian government should investigate his conduct," Rajapakse said.

Solheim hit back yesterday, accusing Rajapakse of inventing the allegations as he enters campaign mode for a presidential election widely expected in January.

"President Rajapakse tells lies about me as election approaches. I will set the truth straight tomorrow," Solheim said in a tweet, before telling AFP he would give a more detailed response today.

Solheim failed to secure a peace deal despite arranging a truce which broke down in April 2006. Three years later Sri Lankan forces crushed the rebellion.

Rajapakse in his address said Solheim gave money to the guerrillas even while peace moves were under way.

Solheim, who led Norwegian peace efforts between 1999 and 2006, recently announced his willingness to give evidence before any international tribunal probing Lanka's war record.



This photo allegedly shows members of the Islamic State jihadist group preparing the simultaneous beheadings of at least 15 men described as Syrian military personnel. In the highly choreographed sequence, jihadists march the prisoners by a wooden box of long military knives, each taking one as they pass, before forcing their victims to kneel in a line and decapitating them.

'Israel will never limit settlement activities'

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel will never agree to limit its construction activity in annexed east Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said yesterday.

"One thing should be clear: we will never accept the definition of building in Jewish neighbourhoods of Jerusalem as settlement activity," he said at a news conference with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

"We won't accept any limitation on building in Jewish areas of (east) Jerusalem," he said.

His remarks came four days after Israel approved plans to build 200 homes in Ramot in occupied east Jerusalem despite months of almost daily clashes and tensions there with Palestinians, triggered in part by settlement expansion.

The announcement prompted a sharply-worded rebuke from Washington which reiterated its "unequivocal" opposition to such construction in east Jerusalem.

Israel seized east Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it a move never recognised by the international community. It refers to the entire city as its "united, undivided capital" and does not view construction there as settlement activity.

The Palestinians want the city's eastern sector as capital of their promised state and vehemently oppose any Israeli attempt to expand construction there.

ISIS seven times bigger!

Senior Kurdish leader claims jihadists have army of 200,000

AGENCIES

The Islamic State (ISIS) has recruited an army hundreds of thousands strong, far larger than previous estimates by the CIA, according to a senior Kurdish leader. He said the ability of ISIS to attack on many widely separated fronts in Iraq and Syria at the same time shows that the number of militant fighters is at least 200,000, seven or eight times bigger than foreign intelligence estimates of up to 31,500 men.

Fuad Hussein, the chief of staff of the Kurdish President Massoud Barzani said in an exclusive interview with The Independent that "I am talking about hundreds of thousands of fighters because they are able to mobilise Arab young men in the territory they have taken."

He estimates that ISIS rules a third of Iraq and a third of Syria with a population of between 10 and 12 million living in an area of 250,000 square kilometres. This gives the jihadis a large pool of potential recruits.

Proof that Isis has created a large field army at great speed is that it has been launching attacks against the Kurds in northern Iraq and the Iraqi army close

to Baghdad at the same time as it is fighting in Syria. He said it is impossible for 31,500 ISIS men to do so.

The high figure for Isis's combat strength is important because it underlines how difficult it will be to eliminate ISIS even with US air strikes. In September, the CIA produced an estimate of ISIS numbers which calculated

WAR ON ISIS

Obama rules out alliance with Assad
Top US general tells troops battle against Isis is 'starting to turn'

that the movement had between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters.

Hussein speculates that the CIA and US intelligence agencies may only have been speaking about "core" fighters in claiming that the jihadis had at most 31,500 men under arms.

General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, arrived in Baghdad on Friday in a surprise visit to boost the moral of coalition forces.

Dempsey has told troops in Iraq that the battle against ISIS is "starting

to turn", but he believes the campaign against the militant group will last several years.

He called the militants "midgets," Reuters news agency reported.

His visit followed news on Friday that Iraqi forces have recaptured the refinery town of Baiji from ISIS, driving the militants out and breaking the siege of the giant oil refinery nearby, marking a significant success for the Iraqi government.

Meanwhile, US President Barack Obama yesterday rejected any alliance with Bashar al-Assad against the ISIS, arguing that the Syrian ruler was illegitimate and that any such pact would backfire.

"Assad has ruthlessly murdered hundreds of thousands of his citizens. As a consequence, he has completely lost legitimacy with the majority of the country," Obama told reporters after a G20 summit in Brisbane.

Obama has built an international coalition against ISIS as it ramps up across both Syria and Iraq. The coalition in September launched its first air strikes against the militants, using Syrian air space, and Obama is deploying up to 1,500 more US troops to Iraq.

G20 SUMMIT IN BRISBANE



President Vladimir Putin, left, and US President Barack Obama pose for photos with koala in Brisbane, Australia, on Saturday. There may have been sharp differences during policy discussions but G20 leaders were unanimous in their desire to be photographed with the furry grey animals.

PHOTO: DAILY MAIL

Leaders urge 'strong action' on climate

AFP, Brisbane

The world's most powerful economies urge "strong and effective action" on climate change, catapulting the issue up the G20 agenda in a new boost for campaigners after a surprising Sino-US breakthrough.

The grouping, which includes the world's worst greenhouse gas polluters -- the United States and China, also threw its support behind a United Nations fund aimed at helping poorer countries deal with the problem.

"We support strong and effective action to address climate change," G20 leaders said in a communique after weekend talks in Brisbane.

The G20 talks follow the breakthrough between China and the United States on curbing carbon emissions last week, and calls from US President Barack Obama and European leaders demanding action at the G20 on climate.

In their declaration, G20 leaders said they aimed to support sustainable development, economic growth, and certainty for business and investment and would press for a post-Kyoto deal in the French capital in December next year.

The declaration also called on members to communicate their national contributions well in advance of this meeting, preferably by the first quarter of 2015 if possible.

Japan confirmed plans to give up to \$1.5 billion to the UN-backed Green Climate Fund, joining a US pledge of \$3 billion to mitigate the impact of global warming on poorer nations. France and Germany have already pledged to contribute \$1 billion each to the UN's new climate fund.

In Brisbane, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon labelled it "the defining issue of our times". Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi added his voice to the calls for action, saying the damage humans had done to the planet over the centuries was heavy.

Campaigners said climate change had prevailed as a dominant economic agenda item for G20 leaders.

"Brisbane G20 may well become known as the 'de facto' climate change summit," said WWF-Australia chief Dermot O'Gorman,

adding that Turkey had promised to make climate change a top priority when it hosts the group next year.

Meanwhile, Western nations sent a firm message to Russia at this weekend's G20 summit that it must stop its "unacceptable" meddling in Ukraine or face further sanctions, UK PM David Cameron said yesterday.

With relations between the West and Moscow at their lowest ebb since the Cold War, Obama warned Russia's isolation would only deepen if it refused to change course.

NEWS IN BRIEF

China to host G20 summit in 2016
AFP, Brisbane

Asian powerhouse China will host world leaders for the G20 summit in 2016, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said yesterday at the conclusion of two days of talks in Brisbane.

Turkey takes over the presidency from Australia and will host the event in Antalya next year.

Month-old battle kills 356 in Benghazi
AFP, Benghazi

At least 356 people have been killed in fighting for Libya's second city of Benghazi since the launch of a government-backed offensive against Islamist militias a month ago. All of Libya's three big cities are largely under the control of Islamist-led militias.

Okinawa elects leader opposed to US base
AFP, Naha

Residents of Japan's Okinawa yesterday elected a governor who opposes plans to relocate a US military base within the island chain, which is strategically key to the US-Japan security alliance. Okinawa is home to more than half of the 47,000 US service personnel stationed in Japan.

Nigerian army recaptures Chibok
AFP, Abuja

The Nigerian army yesterday said it had recaptured the northeastern town of Chibok, where Islamic militants abducted more than 200 schoolgirls in April, provoking a wave of global outrage. The army recaptured the town from Boko Haram militants late Saturday.



PHOTO: YUNUS CENTRE

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus chats with former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev during the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall celebrations in Berlin, on November 9, 2014.

The 'notebook' lovers

Devoted couple married for 65 years die minutes apart

MAIL ONLINE

A devoted couple who were married for 65 years died just minutes apart from each other because they couldn't bear to be separated, their family has said.

Harry Stevenson, 88, died in a care home moments after staff told him of the death of his beloved 89-year-old wife, Mavis.

The couple met at a social club when they were 16 and refused to be apart after being separated during the Second World War, their nephew said.

Stephen Creswell, 63, from Belper, Derbyshire, said: "Their love lasted and they were devoted to each other. I can imagine them being together now, after their death, side by side.

"I know they just couldn't bear to be separated."

True love: Mr and Mrs Stevenson's lifelong romance echoed the plot of popular romantic film, The Notebook

The couple spent their final months at St Werburgh's House Care Home, Derby, where Mrs Stevenson was moved after her health started to deteriorate. Mr Stevenson chose to move in so that he did he could stay close to his wife. The couple died in their shared

room on November 3. The teenage sweethearts began courting shortly before Mr Stevenson signed up to fight in the Second World War on his 17th birthday in 1943.



The couple married soon after he returned and Stevenson went back to work for British Celanese as a joiner where he worked for 50 years.

Grace Matebele, manager at St Werburgh's House, said it was a special ending for the couple, who shared a bedroom together.

Suicide blast wounds Afghan female MP

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

A suicide bomber has tried to assassinate Shukria Barakzai, a prominent female member of Afghanistan's parliament, in an attack that killed three people and wounded the lawmaker.

Barakzai was slightly injured in the attack on her vehicle as she was heading to parliament, said interior ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqqi.

Another three people, including a young girl, were killed, he said. Earlier the ministry's deputy spokesman Najib Danish said at least a dozen others were wounded.

The attacker was in a car that attempted to ram Barakzai's vehicle. The assailant then detonated explosives, causing a massive blast that was heard across the capital, Sediqqi said.

Interior minister Mohammad Umar Daudzai visited Barakzai at the hospital, Sediqqi said, adding that her driver was also wounded and hospitalised.

Barakzai, 42, is a high-profile advocate of women's rights and media freedom. She has been a member of parliament for 10 years and her work has been recognised internationally with a number of awards.

Afghanistan is grappling with a vicious insurgency led by the Taliban, who last week made a similar assassination attempt against Kabul's chief of police General Mohammad Zahir Zahir.

India launches drive to catch \$100b dollar global market

AFP, New Delhi

India's new government has launched a drive to promote the country's ancient therapies as it seeks to cash in on the multi-billion dollar global market for holistic medicine.

India claims to have natural remedies for everything from cancer to the common cold, but ministers say it has failed to capitalise on its traditions as the world has woken up to alternative medicine.

Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a teetotal vegetarian who practices yoga daily, has said he wants the world to make Ayurveda "a way of life" -- and in doing so expand India's share of the growing global market for holistic medicine.

Earlier this month he appointed India's first minister for Ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and homeopathy -- known as the AAYUSH ministry -- and has also called for an international yoga day.

"Call it whatever -- Ayurvedic medicines or herbal medicines or traditional medicines -- the global market is estimated at about \$100 billion today," former health minister Harsh Vardhan told a recent conference on Ayurveda in

New Delhi. "India's share in this is negligible because quality standards are not maintained to international specifications. The government has decided to address this lacuna."

Ayurvedic medicine -- which means the "science of life" in Sanskrit -- treats the physical and mental sources of illness through, for example, prescribing herbs in conjunction with yoga or massage.

Much of the knowledge has been passed on through the generations by word of mouth and predates written records, but two volumes of remedies and prescriptions have survived, called the Charaka Samhita and the Sushruta Samhita.

Critics say that Ayurvedic remedies have no proven curative properties for disease, and

instead work as a placebo. But Modi, who as a young man wandered the Himalayas on a spiritual quest, said Ayurvedic remedies should be seen as complementary to modern medicine.

Ayurvedic centres and clinics have also sprung up in Europe and the United States in recent years, and global chain The Body Shop has created its own range of Ayurvedic products.

ANCIENT AYURVEDA

