

## LTTE-held Sampur town falls to Lankan military

Colombo freezes Tamil aid accounts

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's government said it pushed Tamil Tiger rebels from the mouth of strategic Trincomalee harbour on Monday, and that it would therefore halt its offensive.

The government recaptured the southern edge of the harbour after days of artillery battles for control of the area called Sampur.

The rebels had been able to shell a major naval base and disrupt a maritime supply route to the besieged army-held Jaffna peninsula to the north from their positions in Sampur.

"We are in total control," said

Keheliya Rambukwella, a government defence spokesman and minister for policy planning. "Thereafter, we will not continue with any offensive operations unless we are forced to as a result of enemy action."

He said the entire harbour mouth, which had included several Sea Tiger bases, was now in government hands.

The Tigers said they were still fighting troops with mortar bombs and small arms fire in Sampur's suburbs, and accused the government of trying to destroy what is left of a 2002 truce that still technically holds on paper.

"This is a severe breach of the

ceasefire agreement with the Sri Lankan military taking LTTE-controlled areas," S Puleedevan, head of the rebels' peace secretariat, said by telephone from the Tigers' northern stronghold of Kilinochchi.

"They are not honouring the ceasefire agreement. They are forcing it to the brink of collapse," he added. "On our side we are fully committed to it."

Analysts fear the Tigers might launch attacks elsewhere in retaliation.

Hundreds of troops, rebels and civilians have been killed and more than 200,000 people displaced during more than a month of

renewed civil war.

By Sunday, at least 14 soldiers had been killed and 92 wounded since the Sampur offensive began a week earlier. The army estimates around 120 rebels were killed there by the weekend.

There were no details of any new casualties during Monday's advance.

The push came after the Central Bank's Financial Intelligence Unit said it had frozen bank accounts belonging to the Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), effectively the rebels' humanitarian wing, amid a probe into whether aid money is being given to the rebels for weapons.

## Georgian rebels tried to shoot down president, US senators

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgia accused rebels yesterday of forcing down a helicopter carrying the defence minister and firing on another helicopter transporting President Mikheil Saakashvili and a delegation of US senators.

Tensions rose Monday in the rebel province of South Ossetia, on the border of ex-Soviet Georgia and Russia, with both separatist forces and a Russian peacekeeping contingent announcing they were on heightened alert. Russian news agencies reported.

Defence Minister Irakli Okruashvili said that his Mi-8 helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing Sunday after taking fire over the breakaway province of South Ossetia.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian labourers retrieve belongings from a submerged dwelling in Srinagar yesterday after incessant rains caused flash flooding in the Himalayan State. Twelve people were killed in house collapses caused by heavy monsoon rains in Indian Kashmir as army and police said that they are attempting to rescue thousands trapped by flood waters.



PHOTO: AFP

An Afghan policeman looks at a bomb damaged car on a street in Kabul yesterday. A suicide car bomb killed a British soldier and four Afghans in Afghanistan's capital.

## Taliban attack Afghan town: 19 killed

AFP, AP, Kandahar/ Kabul

Taliban rebels attacked a district town in southern Afghanistan overnight, sparking an intense battle in which 16 militants and three policemen were killed, police said yesterday.

It was the second attack on the small Helmand province town of Garmser since Friday, when four Taliban and a policeman were killed in another attempt to seize the district headquarters.

Taliban fighters captured the headquarters for around 48 hours in mid-July, pulling down the national flag and hoisting one that police said was of a pro-Taliban, Pakistan-based militant outfit.

"Last night once again Taliban attacked Garmser district of

Helmand province," provincial police chief Mohammad Nabi Mullahkhail told AFP.

"The fighting continued for hours and 16 Taliban were killed. Nine Taliban bodies were left at the site of the battle and 10 Taliban were wounded," he said. The rebels sometimes take the bodies of their dead away with them.

"Three police was also martyred in the incident," Mullahkhail said.

Garmser is just 50km south of the Helmand capital, Lashkar Gah, the seat of the provincial government and site of a British base.

The bulk of a British deployment of around 4,500 troops is based in Helmand where they have admitted to confronting some of the British army's worst and most prolonged fighting in years.

## Anger mounts in Lebanon over Israeli blockade

AFP, Beirut/ Naqura

Anger is mounting in Lebanon's business community over the Israeli air and sea blockade on the country, seen as humiliating and unjustified three weeks into the ceasefire that ended the war between Israel and Hezbollah.

"The purpose of this blockade at this point is beyond me," Elias Sfeir, owner of Tools and Building Materials, told AFP, reflecting a general sentiment among business leaders.

"Now we feel that more and more the Israeli attitude is aimed against all the Lebanese, it is no longer against Hezbollah as such."

Sfeir said 15 containers with

goods worth half a million dollars for his company have been blocked in ports outside Lebanon since the blockade went into effect on July 13.

"If this goes on for another month, I'll have to shut down and tell all the staff -- 40 people -- to go home," he said.

Israel imposed the blockade a day after militants from the Shia Hezbollah group seized two of its soldiers in a cross-border raid that sparked a month-long conflict that killed 1,200 people in Lebanon, overwhelmingly civilians, and at least 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

Israel has said that the blockade was to prevent Hezbollah from rearming and that it would be lifted once a UN brokered truce that went

into effect on August 14 has been implemented fully.

But given that the ceasefire has held for three weeks and mounting calls by the international community, including the European Union and the United Nations, for the blockade to be lifted, there is general consensus in Lebanon that the measure is no longer justified.

The Lebanese government has said the country sustained some 3.6 billion dollars in material losses as a result of the war and billions more in economic losses. It has also warned of a recession and Lebanese MPs since Saturday have held a sit-in at parliament to protest the blockade.

## Nepali security beefed up for Maoist protest

AFP, Kathmandu

Hundreds of riot police were deployed in Nepal's capital yesterday after Maoists threatened a "revolution" and bussed in several thousand injured rebel veterans for a meeting.

Maoist leader Prachanda "has called for street protests so of course we have beefed up the security on the streets," a government minister told

AFP on condition of anonymity.

The rebels told AFP that they had brought in up to 3,000 disabled members of the "People's Liberation Army" for a commemoration meeting of veterans injured in the 10-year insurgency.

"The government might have seen our veteran fighters and increased security because of them," said Krishna Bahadur Mahara, the rebel

spokesman.

"At present we are not planning any protest programmes, as we are still in the talks process," he added.

The flood of veterans came after Prachanda told a rally in the capital on Saturday that mass protests could ensue if rebel demands for the election of a body to rewrite the country's constitution were not met.

## Olmert wants talks with Abbas

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said yesterday that he wanted dialogue with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, saying the Palestinian "problem" was the most urgent issue facing the Jewish state.

"I want and intend to hold a dialogue with Abu Mazen," Olmert told reporters in Jerusalem, calling Abbas by his widely-used moniker.

"We have no problem that is more urgent than the Palestinian problem," the premier said.

Olmert and Abbas last met on June 22 in Jordan, in an informal meeting over breakfast hosted by

King Abdullah II in Petra.

The Israeli government cut all contacts with the Palestinian Authority headed by Abbas on April 11, after the Islamist Hamas movement formed a government following its upset election victory in January.

Israel, along with the European Union and the United States, considers Hamas a terrorist organisation.

Hamas has killed scores of Israelis in suicide bombings over the years, but its armed wing has not claimed responsibility for any such attacks inside the Jewish state since January 2005.

## 4 US, British soldiers killed in Iraq attacks

14 'terrorists' slain, 33 mutilated bodies recovered

AFP, Baghdad/ London

Iraqi forces killed 14 "terrorists" and captured almost 200 suspects yesterday in a major operation to clear the outskirts of Baghdad of insurgent fighters while two US and two British soldiers were killed in separate attacks.

Two US marines were killed by "enemy action" in Iraq's western province of Al-Anbar, a bastion of the Sunni insurgency, the military said Monday.

The marines died Sunday.

Two British soldiers were killed and two others injured in an attack on a military convoy near Basra in southern Iraq on Monday, the Ministry of Defence in London said.

"It is with great regret that we can confirm that two British soldiers have died as a result of an attack on a British patrol near the town of Ad Dayr, north of Basrah City earlier today," said a MoD statement.

"The units in charge of the southern and middle Euphrates district, the 8th and 10th army divisions, killed 14 terrorists and arrested 98 of

them along with 95 more suspects," the statement said.

Meanwhile, at least 33 bullet-riddled bodies of Iraqi men murdered in apparent sectarian killings were recovered by Iraqi forces across Baghdad on Monday, a security official told AFP.

"Iraqi security forces found 33 unidentified bodies on Monday from various parts of Baghdad," the official said on condition of anonymity.

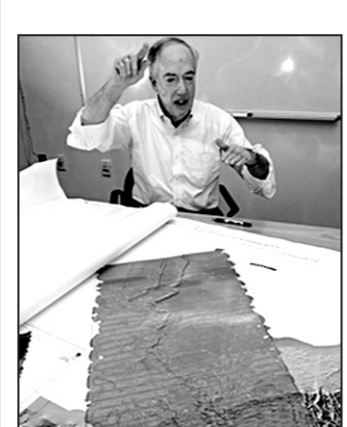
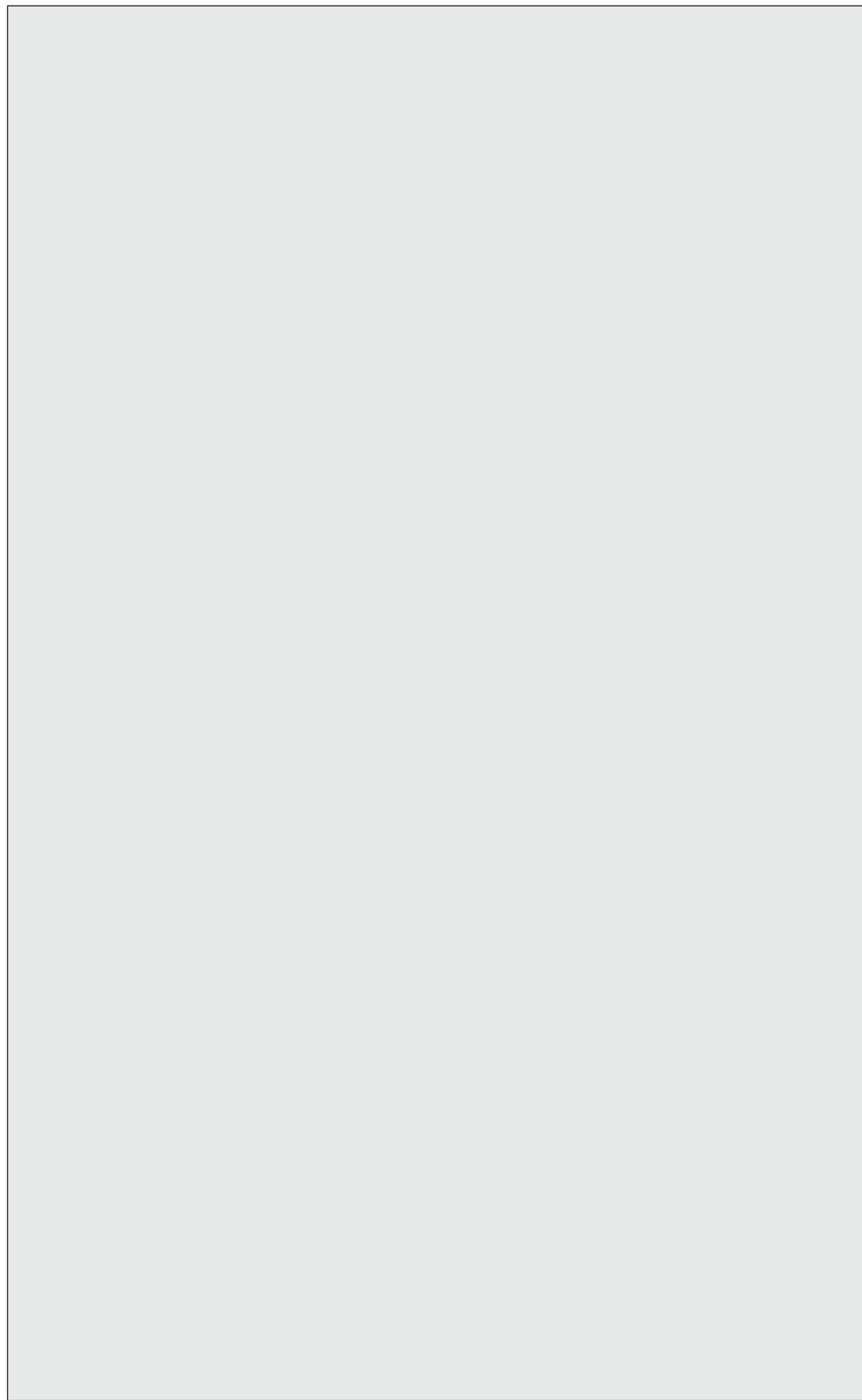


PHOTO: AP

Professor Peter A Rona sits at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey Monday near a computer-generated map showing the Hudson Canyon on the ocean floor, as he talks about his four-year ocean floor mapping project using high-tech mapping tools.

## Scientists map canyon below Atlantic

AP, New Brunswick

Although just 100 miles off the New Jersey-New York coast, the features of the Hudson Canyon have been largely hidden beneath hundreds of feet of water. Created by the Hudson River centuries ago, parts of the massive, undersea region rival the Grand Canyon in scale. Now, for the first time, scientists have a vivid picture of what the mysterious region looks like.

A four-year study using high-tech tools has produced maps that will allow scientists to study many things, including whether methane gas trapped in frozen sediment below the sea floor is escaping and exacerbating global warming.

Also of interest is whether gas releases could spark undersea landslides that produce tsunamis. Such landslides could also cleave the undersea phone cables that handle much of the nation's overseas communications, said Peter A. Rona, a Rutgers University professor who led the team that produced the maps.