

Tigers kill 9

Lankan soldiers

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday claimed they had killed nine soldiers and repulsed an army advance in areas controlled by the guerrillas to the north of the island.

The pro-rebel, Tamilnet.com website reported that the army faced stiff resistance when it launched twin attacks to break through guerrilla-held areas in Mannar on Tuesday.

"An armoured personnel carrier was destroyed by an LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) mine, killing at least nine soldiers and wounding many," the website said, quoting rebel officials.

There was no immediate comment from the defence ministry, but the military accused the rebels of setting off a roadside mine in Vavuniya on Tuesday, killing two civilians.

Casualty figures cannot be independently verified, as the government prevents journalists and rights groups from travelling into rebel-held areas.

Fighting has intensified since the government in January pulled out of a six-year truce with the Tamil Tigers.

Tens of thousands have died since the rebels launched an armed struggle in 1972 to carve out an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the island's north and east.

11 hurt in Israeli raid in Gaza

AFP, Gaza City

Eleven Palestinians, including 10 Hamas fighters, were wounded during a pre-dawn incursion into the Gaza Strip by Israeli troops, Palestinian rescue workers and witnesses said.

Israeli armoured vehicles and bulldozers, backed by a drone, entered the region east of the city of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, they said.

The Palestinians were injured by Israeli fire and during two raids by the drone, one of which targeted a house containing armed men, they said.

Hamas, which seized control of Gaza nearly a year ago, confirmed that 10 of the wounded were fighters from the Islamist movement, and that they had fired mortars and rocket-propelled grenades at the Israeli forces.

An Israeli army spokeswoman said troops "had opened fire near Khan Yunis against armed Palestinians... The soldiers said that some of them had been hit."

She said she had no information on the reported air raids by the drones.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian air force officials load relief material for cyclone-affected Myanmar on board an aircraft in New Delhi yesterday. Many aid agencies are still awaiting travel visas to enter the country

Myanmar's generals shun US aid, see risk to political power

AFP, Washington

choice than that," he said. "It illustrates the real human cost of the isolation the regime has brought about."

As Myanmar's military rulers laid out stringent conditions for foreign relief groups to get into the battered country, President George W. Bush told them Tuesday: "Let the United States come to help you, help the people."

Washington, which has imposed heavy sanctions on the regime, has emphasized that this should not hinder humanitarian aid -- citing the US response to a December 2003 earthquake that devastated Iran's southeast city of Bam.

Even as US response teams remained barred, the White House announced it would send three million dollars into Myanmar through response teams currently working out of Bangkok.

The generals have a choice to make between helping the Burmese people -- who are in dire need of help -- or, out of fear of losing their total grip on power and spoils, effectively turning away international assistance," said Walter Lohman, a southeast Asia expert at the Washington-based Heritage Foundation.

"There could not be a more stark

image in the two countries following the 2003 Iraq invasion.

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Before the disaster it would have been unthinkable for a US aircraft carrier to dock in Indonesia's waters, or US Marines to rub shoulders with troops from the world's most populous Muslim nation.

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