

69 Tigers killed in two days of fighting

AFP, AP, Colombo

At least 69 Tiger rebels and two soldiers have been killed in heavy fighting in Sri Lanka's north where security forces wrested more territory from the guerrillas, the defence ministry said Thursday. Heavy fighting since Tuesday left 69 Tiger guerrillas and two soldiers killed in separate clashes across the districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu and Jaffna, the ministry said.

It said Mi-24 helicopter gunships were deployed Wednesday to pound suspected positions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Mannar district.

A new wave of fighting across Sri Lanka's embattled northern region killed at least 32 ethnic Tamil rebels and four government soldiers, the ministry said Wednesday.

Fighting has escalated in recent months as government forces have tried to break into the Tamil Tigers' northern strongholds from four fronts. The government has pledged to capture rebel-held territory and crush the insurgents by the end of the year.

The latest battles took place Tuesday in the Mannar, Vavuniya, Welioya and Jaffna areas bordering the guerrillas' de facto state, military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara said.

Army troops advanced into rebel territory in Mannar district from three directions, capturing about a square mile in a battle that killed 10 rebels and wounded five soldiers, Nanayakkara said. Other fighting in Mannar killed three rebels and one soldier, he said.

Separate clashes in Vavuniya killed 13 rebels and one soldier,

while battles in Jaffna and Welioya killed six rebels and two soldiers, Nanayakkara said.

Also Tuesday, air force fighters bombed a training base in the rebel stronghold of Mullaitivu while helicopter gunships pounded rebel bunkers along the front lines in Mannar, a military statement said.

The military did not give any figures for casualties or damage from the air attacks.

Rebel spokesman Thaya Master confirmed that heavy fighting took place in Mannar on Tuesday, but did not give casualty figures. He declined to comment on other fighting, saying he needed to check the military's claims with his superiors.

It was not possible to independently verify the military reports because journalists are banned from the northern jungles where much of the fighting takes place.

Each side commonly exaggerates its enemy's casualties and downplays its own.

There was no immediate word from the Tigers on the latest fighting, but the guerrillas in a statement said a civilian was killed in a mine attack carried out by government commandos inside rebel-held territory on Wednesday.

The defence ministry claims raise the number of rebels reported killed by government troops since the beginning of the year to 4,459, against the loss of 414 soldiers.

The Tamil Tiger rebels have fought since 1983 to create an independent state for ethnic minority Tamils, who have been marginalized by successive governments controlled by ethnic Sinhalese. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

BJP announces first list of candidates for LS polls

PTI, New Delhi

BJP today announced its first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, fielding its Prime Ministerial candidate L.K. Advani from Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

"The countdown to the end of the UPA rule has begun from today. Our Prime Ministerial candidate L.K. Advani would be contesting from the Gandhinagar parliamentary seat," party General Secretary Anant Kumar said while announcing the list at the party headquarters here.

The list also included the names of five other candidates -- Navjot Singh Sidhu (Amritsar), Vinod Khanna (Gurdaspur), Shripad Y. Naik (Panaji), Anurag Thakur (Hamirpur) and T.P.S. Rawat (Pauri).

The decision was taken at the meeting of Central Election Committee (CEC) here today, he added.



Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala (R) walks past Maoist leaders after delivering a speech to a Constituent Assembly meeting in Kathmandu yesterday. Nepal's interim premier and architect of the country's peace process has announced his resignation in a move that paves the way for a new government following the abolition of the monarchy.



Israeli soldier scuffles with Palestinian and international protesters during a demonstration against the construction of the controversial Israeli cement barrier in the West Bank village of Niliin near Ramallah yesterday.

Rival groups clash during Pak by-elections

Taliban torch ski resort, kill three

AFP, Islamabad

Rival groups clashed with guns and sticks during polling in Pakistan yesterday, a day after a court postponed voting in a constituency where ex-premier Nawaz Sharif hoped to stand.

Security was tight across the country during polling for five parliamentary constituencies and 23 provincial assembly seats left empty following general elections in February.

Police said four people were wounded and 11 others arrested when rival groups clashed outside a polling station in Jehania town, near the city of Multan in Punjab province.

"The rival groups fired in the air and used batons against each other at a main polling station in Jehania, injuring four people," local police official Kamran Khan told reporters.

It was not clear which parties the groups supported.

Voting was suspended at a separate women's polling station

when another group shot into the air, Khan added.

Pakistan's election commission said polling was peaceful everywhere except Jehania.

"The commission immediately took notice of the situation in Jehania and it was brought under control," election commission secretary Kanwar Dilshad told AFP.

The by-elections are being held to fill seats left empty for a variety of reasons, including unrest and candidates winning more than one seat in February's poll.

In the general election, allies of US-backed President Pervez Musharraf were trounced by the parties of slain ex-premier Benazir Bhutto and Sharif, who was ousted from power by Musharraf in a 1999 coup.

The government has declared local holidays in the constituencies where by-elections were being held and long queues formed at polling stations, Dilshad said.

"Security is on high alert and the provincial governments have taken

special measures to maintain law and order during the polling," he said.

"We urge the people to go to polling stations and cast their votes and fulfill their national duty."

Dilshad said polling was being conducted in an "absolutely transparent, fair and just manner."

The Supreme Court on Wednesday postponed polling for one parliamentary seat in the eastern city of Lahore after the government lodged an appeal against the disqualification of Sharif earlier in the week.

Meanwhile, Pakistani Taliban militants torched the country's only ski resort and separately killed three people in a northwestern tourist valley, despite a recent truce with security forces, officials said.

The attack on the government-run hotel happened at Malam Jabba, part of the troubled Swat Valley where followers of an Islamist cleric signed a peace deal with Pakistani authorities in May after months of clashes.

INDO-AMERICAN NUKE DEAL

US hopes India will complete internal processes

PTI, Washington

Ahead of his visit to New Delhi next week, senior US Congressman Gary Ackerman has said he looked forward to Indian government completing its "internal processes" on the historic nuclear deal so that the accord can be approved by the American Congress.

Maintaining that it would be foolish to squander away the gains in the bilateral relationship of the last decade, especially over the last three years, the New York Democrat, who is Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Sub Committee on Middle East and South Asia, said he strongly supported the 123 Agreement, which will operationalise the nuclear deal.

"I strongly support the 123 agreement and I look forward to the Government of India completing its internal processes so that the US Congress can give final approval to

this historic deal," he said.

However, he said "there was much more to the July 2005 joint statement (between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and US President George W. Bush) than civil nuclear cooperation and there is much more to US-India relations than just the 123 agreement."

"In fact the 2005 statement covered a broad range of issues among which civil nuclear cooperation was just one," Democratic Congressman Ackerman said at a hearing titled 'More Than Just The 123 Agreement: The Future of US-India Relations.'

Ackerman, whose remarks came amid the UPA-left deadlock over the nuclear deal, will be in New Delhi between July 2 and 4 even as sequencing of his overall five-nation trip that will also take him to Egypt, Israel, Pakistan and Afghanistan is still being worked out, sources told PTI.

Indian rebel leaders announce truce

AP, Guwahati

Several commanders of a leading separatist group in India's restive northeast announced a cease-fire Wednesday and called for an end to their 30-year rebellion, separatist leaders and government officials said.

Authorities called the battalion's truce offer a "positive development" but it was unclear whether the cease-fire signalled a possible end to the fighting or merely an internal split in rebel leadership.

The United Liberation Front of Asom, or ULFA, has been the most prominent of the many rebel groups fighting for an independent homeland in the state of Assam since 1979. The 12 commanders who announced the cease-fire belong to the ULFA's deadliest squad, the 28th battalion.

"We have decided to call a cease-fire to facilitate restoration of peace in Assam state," said an ULFA statement. "We have respect for the people's cherished desire for peace and an end to violence."

Assam state Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi welcomed their call. "We welcome the decision by

the ULFA leaders to call a cease-fire, and the move to start peace talks with the government of India will help to restore peace in Assam," he said in a statement, calling on other ULFA leaders to join the peace process.

No details of possible peace talks were released and the rebel group's central leadership has not commented on the battalion's truce.

One of the commanders who signed the cease-fire statement, Mrinal Hazarika, was released on bail Saturday after being held in government detention since 2005. Authorities apparently granted his bail plea to enable him to facilitate the peace process.

One analyst said lasting peace was unlikely to return to Assam, a state of 26 million people, until peace talks are held with the entire ULFA leadership.

"The government should think of holding peace talks with the ULFA as a group, not with some factional leaders," said Nani Gopal Mahanta, who heads the Peace and Conflict Studies Centre at Gauhati University. "Factionalism can make matters worse in Assam, which is already in turmoil."

Mugabe holds final rallies ahead of Zimbabwe vote

Rice warns Mugabe of declaring polls victory

AFP, AP, Harare

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe held final campaign rallies Thursday on the eve of a one-man election denounced as a sham by the West after the opposition leader pulled out of the contest.

As former South African president Nelson Mandela added to international pressure on Mugabe over violence in the country, the Zimbabwe leader defiantly rejected all criticism and portrayed his rival Morgan Tsvangirai as a stooge of ex-colonial power Britain.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change's number two was granted bail by a court after he was charged with treason, but Tsvangirai remained holed up in the Dutch embassy in Harare four days after withdrawing from the vote.

Mugabe's last major election appearance was to take place in Chitungwiza, just outside the capital Harare, a traditional opposition stronghold. Several thou-

sand people gathered in a shopping mall ahead of his arrival, many of them bussed in by Mugabe's ZANU-PF party.

ZANU-PF activists spent the morning knocking on doors, telling local people to attend Mugabe's campaign address. Some shops closed and streets in the area were deserted.

In a rally late Wednesday near the border with Mozambique, Mugabe castigated Britain and took a thinly veiled swipe at the Southern African Development Community, a 14-nation regional bloc which has urged him to postpone the vote.

International criticism of Mugabe has intensified, with Mandela speaking of a "tragic failure of leadership in our neighbouring Zimbabwe" in a rare public statement on the crisis late Wednesday.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice yesterday warned Zimbabwe's president against declaring victory in what she said will be an illegitimate run-off election this week.

Scientists think big impact caused two-faced Mars

AP, Los Angeles

Why is Mars two-faced? Scientists say fresh evidence supports the theory that a monster impact punched the red planet, leaving behind perhaps the largest gash on any heavenly body in the solar system.

Today, the Martian surface has a split personality. The southern hemisphere of Mars is pockmarked and filled with ancient rugged highlands. By contrast, the northern hemisphere is smoother and covered by low-lying plains.

Three papers in Thursday's journal Nature provide the most convincing evidence yet that an outside force was responsible.

According to the researchers, an asteroid or comet whacked a young Mars some 4 billion years ago, blasting away much of its northern crust and creating a giant hole over 40 percent of the surface.

New calculations reveal the crater known as the Borealis basin measures 5,300 miles across and 6,600 miles long the size of Asia, Europe and Australia combined. It's believed to be four times bigger than the current tideholder, the South Pole-Aitken basin on Earth's moon.



This artist's rendition released by Jeffery Andrews-Hanna of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, shows an impact on the surface of Mars. Scientists say fresh evidence supports the theory that a monster impact punched the red planet, leaving behind perhaps the largest gash on any heavenly body in the solar system.



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If you are a recognized talent, looking for the next step in your career, please send your resume with details of your current/past job responsibilities, Academic and Professional Qualifications, minimum expected Salary along with a PP size photo before June 30, 2008 to:

General Manager - Human Resources
CMA CGM Bangladesh Ltd.
13th Floor, Land View Commercial Centre
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Only short listed candidate will be contacted for an interview