

Fighting grips Lanka as troops up offensive

34 combatants killed in clashes, Tamil civilians asked to cross over to govt controlled areas

AFP, PTI, Colombo

Government forces and Tamil Tiger separatists fought heavy battles in northern Sri Lanka with another 34 combatants killed in fresh clashes, the defence ministry said Friday.

Troops encountered stiff resistance from the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as troops tried to move deeper into rebel territory, defence officials said.

The ministry said 27 rebels were killed and another 30 wounded in fighting since Thursday, while security forces lost four soldiers killed and another 14 wounded.

The latest casualty figures raise the number of rebels reported killed by troops since January to 6,363. The military says 613 soldiers were killed during the same period.

The figures cannot be independently verified.

The military wants to dismantle the Tigers' de facto mini-state by capturing the town of Kilinochchi, 330 kilometres (200 miles) north of Colombo. Government troops were said to be within striking distance.

Government troops were now said to be within striking distance. The military on Wednesday evening accepted the bodies of 19 soldiers killed by the Tigers during this week's fighting that saw security forces capture the strategic town of Mullaitivu from the rebels.

The defence ministry described the capture of Mullaitivu as "one more decisive and impressive phase" in its campaign to defeat the Tigers, who have fought for decades for a homeland for minority Tamils in

island's north and east.

However, the state-run Daily News said Friday the guerrillas offered stiff resistance and both troops and the Tigers suffered damages on "equal terms".

"More fierce battles are expected as troops close in on Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu," the paper said, adding the Tigers could offer stiff resistance "for weeks, but not for months".

He told the Tamil population that the army would ensure their safe passage. Rajapaksa's offer came as his military continued its push into the LTTE's headquarters of Kilinochchi and nearby Mullaitivu.

The government forces are encountering stiff resistance from the Tigers who have deployed all their resources to guard their nerve centre.

living in rebel territory to cross over to government-held areas in the island's north to avoid getting caught up in the crossfire.

As the Lankan forces moved deeper into the rebel Tamil Tigers stronghold of Kilinochchi, the Country's President Mahinda Rajapaksa has asked civilians in LTTE controlled areas to cross-over to government controlled areas.

He told the Tamil population that the army would ensure their safe passage. Rajapaksa's offer came as his military continued its push into the LTTE's headquarters of Kilinochchi and nearby Mullaitivu.

The government forces are encountering stiff resistance from the Tigers who have deployed all their resources to guard their nerve centre.

Aso announces bid to lead Japan's ruling party

AP, Tokyo

Japan's brash, right-leaning former foreign minister announced Friday that he would run for ruling party president in a move that would put him on track to take over as Japan's next prime minister.

Taro Aso, 67, is widely considered the front-runner to replace struggling Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who announced Monday that he would step down amid sagging poll numbers and troubles with the split parliament.

A former Olympic skeet shooter, Aso is focusing his campaign on Japan's troubled economy, which is suffering from stagnating growth, weak consumer spending and inflation.

"The recovery of the domestic economy and clearing the unease of the people, these are the things we have to address in the election," Aso told reporters Friday.

Aso's candidacy for the Sept. 22 vote in the Liberal Democratic Party was widely expected.



Georgian Taneli Basishvili, who claims to be the last Georgian in South Ossetia, walks past Russian troops on an armoured personnel carrier (APC) and destroyed buildings in Kurta, 20km north of Tskhinvali yesterday. Russian soldiers transported Basishvili to Gori upon his request so he could make his way to his son in Tbilisi.

EU ministers in show of unity over Georgia conflict

US draws Russian flak over aid ship

AFP, Avignon/Tbilisi

EU foreign ministers travelled together via high-speed train from Paris to Avignon yesterday in a show of unity over the Georgia crisis ahead of crucial trip to Moscow by French president Nicolas Sarkozy.

Twenty-six of the 27 European Union foreign ministers were to arrive in Avignon, southern France, via rail from the French capital with only their Italian counterpart Franco Frattini deciding to travel separately.

"Unity is not a question," French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency, told reporters on the train.

"But the problems that face us are serious problems. The more we talk the more we will come up with solutions."

"We will continue this weekend to prepare matters" ahead of a crucial meeting in Moscow on Monday between Sarkozy and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said.

At an EU summit on Monday, European leaders froze talks on a

new strategic pact with Moscow and said they would review all ties following Russia's refusal to pull its troops out of Georgia following fighting there last month.

The start of that review will be a key part of the two days of EU talks in Avignon ahead of Sarkozy's trip. The special TGV high-speed train left Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport at 11:00 am (0900 GMT) decked out in the colours of the French and EU flags.

The informal talks in Avignon were due to start at 3:00 pm at the ancient Palace of the Popes.

"It's Europe that is seeking high speed," joked Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos.

At Monday's meeting between Sarkozy and Medvedev, the French president will again call on Russia to withdraw its troops in Georgia to the positions they held before the conflict broke out on August 7.

That meeting will be a manifestation of EU unity and the opportunity to deliver "a clear message to the Russia Federation of its wish to establish relations based on solid and mutual respect," said Moratinos.

Meanwhile, a US navy flagship

delivered aid Friday to a Georgian port bombed last month by Russian jets, drawing an angry response from Russia which said it was hardly suited to delivering humanitarian aid.

The Mount Whitney, flagship of the US Sixth Fleet, is the last of three vessels sent by the United States to deliver blankets, hygiene kits, baby food and infant care supplies to Georgia after its five day war with Russia.

"I can confirm it has arrived in Poti. Anchoring procedures are still ongoing but it has arrived," said a US naval official, who asked not to be named.

Russia criticised the sending of the sophisticated warship to Georgia, saying it might contravene international conventions and was unsuited for its supposed aid mission.

The question arises of whether the USS Mount Whitney's entry into the Black Sea conforms with the provisions of the Montreux Convention of 1936, foreign ministry spokesman Andrei Nesterenko told journalists, referring to an international pact limiting naval deployments there.



Republican presidential candidate Arizona Senator John McCain and his running mate Sarah Palin celebrate on the stage at the end of the Republican National Convention (RNC) in St Paul, Minnesota on Thursday.

Democrats gingerly fire back at Palin

AFP, St Paul

Democrats Thursday set about the delicate task of hitting back at Republican vice presidential pick Sarah Palin after she muscled into the political bullring in a combative convention debut.

Barack Obama and other top Democrats were careful to avoid personal attacks on Palin, who was basking in rockstar treatment in the US media, trying instead to turn the focus onto her political record and Republican policies.

Democrats who criticized Palin have already been accused of sexism by the McCain camp, and the Obama campaign is familiar with the perils of gender in politics following the bruising primary duel with Hillary Clinton.

"I anticipated this last Thursday in my acceptance speech," Obama said in York, Pennsylvania, when asked if he had been surprised at the vehemence of Palin's broadsides.

"They don't have an agenda to run on. They haven't offered a single concrete idea so far in two nights about how they would make the lives of middle class Americans better."

"They have spent the entire two nights attacking me or extolling John McCain's biography, which is fine, they can use their convention time any way they want."

"But you can't expect that I would be surprised about attacks from Republicans."

Obama also made clear that despite declaring Palin's family and her 17-year-old daughter's pregnancy off limits, he would not hesitate to pick over her record as Alaska governor and a small town mayor.

"The notion that any questions about her work in Alaska is somehow not relevant to her potentially being vice president of the United States doesn't make too much sense to me," Obama said.

"I think she's got a compelling story, but I assume that she wants to be treated the same way that guys want to be treated, which means that their records are under scrutiny."

"I've been through this for 19 months, she's been through it, what, four days so far?" Obama's vice presidential pick Joseph Biden, who faces a high-stakes showdown with Palin in their running mates debate in October, gave her marks for style not substance.

Missile strike in Pakistan kills children, women

Pak tribesmen protest over cross-border raid

AFP, Miranshah/Peshwar

Three children and two women were killed when missiles fired by a suspected unmanned US aircraft hit a Pakistani tribal village yesterday in the third such attack in as many days, officials said.

The strike hit two houses belonging to tribesmen in North Waziristan's Goorwek Baipali village, 30 kilometres (18 miles) west of the main town of Miranshah, and located right on the border with Afghanistan, they said.

Three children and two women have been killed in the missile strike, which destroyed two village homes, an official said, adding that one woman was injured.

"We suspect that the missiles were fired by forces across the

border," the official added. Residents said two pilotless aircraft fired three missiles.

The latest strike follows Pakistani accusations that US-led forces based in Afghanistan killed 15 people in a border village on Wednesday in neighbouring South Waziristan district.

Security sources said a large demonstration was being planned in South Waziristan's Wana district after Friday prayers to protest at the claimed US-led raid, which involved helicopter gunships and ground troops.

Both the US-led coalition and the separate NATO-led security force operating in Afghanistan have said they have no knowledge of that incident.

South Waziristan is a known

haven for Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants.

Several officials claimed that Friday's missile strike killed children and women, not militants.

Chief military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas said he had received a report of the incident but specified that Pakistan did not conduct any operations there.

Meanwhile, around 3,000 Pakistani tribesmen yesterday chanted "Allahu Akbar and death to America" in protest at a raid by Afghanistan-based US-led troops that saw at least 15 people killed.

One of their elders warned US authorities to prepare for assaults on their bases in Afghanistan if they do not stop attacks on Pakistan's northwest border area, according to local residents and officials.

Syria makes peace proposal to Israel

AP, Damascus

Syria's leader said Thursday he offered a proposal for peace with Israel but also refused to break off ties with Hezbollah and militant Palestinians a key Israeli demand.

President Bashar Assad also said indirect negotiations with Israel were on hold until that country chooses a new prime minister and that direct talks would have to wait until a new US president takes office.

Assad's comments came after meetings with France's leader and regional mediators in talks focusing on Mideast peace and Iran's nuclear programme. France hopes that warmer relations with Syria, Iran's ally, could help the West in its efforts to persuade Iran to curb its nuclear programme.

Assad said his proposal for Israel was intended to serve as a basis for direct talks. He said he would wait

for a similar document laying out Israel's positions before any face-to-face talks. So far, negotiations between the two foes have been held indirectly through Turkish mediators.

Although Assad didn't divulge details of his proposal, the move reflected a desire to break with Syria's past policies. The quest was given a boost by France's President Nicolas Sarkozy, who visited Damascus on Wednesday and Thursday, becoming the first Western leader in several years to come to Syria.

Sarkozy has encouraged face-to-face Syria-Israel negotiations and offered to sponsor such talks in the future. The French president has been trying to forge better relations with both Syria and Libya, a longtime international pariah that has significantly improved ties with the West.



Anti-government protesters stage a demonstration at the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. Anti-government protesters stormed into Thai Government House compound on August 26 demanding Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej resign and that Thailand's democracy be curtailed, saying only 30 percent of seats in parliament should be elected.

Thai PM mulls ending state of emergency

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister said Friday he will consider ending a state of emergency in Bangkok, after the army chief refused to use the special powers to evict protesters squatting outside his offices.

Samak Sundaravej declared the emergency in Bangkok on Tuesday after protesters besieging his offices clashed with his supporters, leaving one person dead and 43 injured.

The emergency put Bangkok under the control of the powerful army chief, General Anupong Paojinda, but he has refused to evict the protesters who have occupied the lawn outside Samak's offices for 11 days.

The emergency decree bans political gatherings of more than five people, but that has been ignored by the protesters, who demand that Samak resign and that Thailand's democracy be curtailed, saying only 30 percent of seats in parliament should be elected. "There is no need for the state of emergency because no one

has complied with it. Since people are not complying with it, I will consider revoking it," Samak told reporters.

"Since they are defying, the decree has not been effective. Therefore I will consult with the concerned officials in a day or two" about ending emergency rule, he said.

Samak appeared to be running out of options for breaking through the stalemate. He has refused to step down or call snap elections, insisting that he would stay in office to defend democracy.

As a compromise, he has proposed holding a referendum asking the public to decide whether he should stay or go.

But critics -- including the head of the Senate and the opposition leader -- slammed that idea, arguing that the balloting would only drag out the turmoil and risked sparking new violence.

"The referendum is going to be a non-starter," said political analyst Thitinan Pongsudhirak, of Chulalongkorn University. "We're back to the same confrontation."



National Programme Officer-Gender

UNFPA Bangladesh, an international development agency, working for promotion of right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity, seeks applications from qualified professionals for the position of **National Programme Officer - Gender**. The incumbent will directly report to the Deputy/Assistant Country Representative to lead the Gender sub-programme of UNFPA country office under the overall guidance of the Country Representative.

The Role

- Work in close collaboration with Government counterparts and facilitate the work of Consultants, Advisors and Experts.
- Develop and maintain effective communication with multi lateral and bilateral donor agencies and civil society to address emerging issues related to gender, violence against women and HRBA.
- Advocate and articulate clearly the gender and rights issues with different stakeholders including donors.
- Design new Gender sub programme.
- Make, in collaboration with Government counterparts, NGOs and other stakeholders, significant input to the formulation and design of the new country programme and sub-programme with component projects in line with the government priorities and according to the organization programme policies and sub-programme procedures, with a gender and HRBA focused approach.
- Develop project proposals for multi-bi funds. Keep abreast of donor's mandate and organizational needs and country priority.
- Perform other duties, as required.

The Qualifications, Experiences and Skills

- Masters degree from a reputed university in Development Studies, Women and Development, Laws, Social Sciences or other disciplines relevant to Gender and Human Rights.
- 8 years' professional experience in development sector programme/project management out of which at least 3-5 years in the relevant field.
- Good understanding of Bangladesh's social, economic, development and political situation.
- Demonstrated ability to manage development programme/project.
- Ability to act as a policy advisor.

Additional Information

- This is a fixed term post at NO-B level which is renewed on a yearly basis.
- UNFPA is committed to maintaining a balanced gender distribution and therefore, encourage women to apply.
- Only short-listed candidates will be contacted and detailed TOR will be provided to them.

Remuneration

- Remuneration package will be in line with organization's pay policy based on experiences and competencies.

Applications

- All applications will be treated on merit and in strict confidence.
- To apply, please forward an updated resume and a one page statement outlining your suitability for the position by Thursday, 18th September 2008 to:

MONOWER ASSOCIATES
MANAGEMENT AND HR CONSULTING

Bilquis Tower (3rd Floor), 6 Gulshan North C/A, Gulshan-2, Dhaka-1212
Tel : 8825100, 8825074 & 9882321, Fax : 8825086, E-mail: masso@masso-hr.com