

# Lankan troops close to capturing key road

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops were close to capturing a key road to the northern peninsula of Jaffna after months of heavy fighting, the defence ministry said yesterday.

Heavily armed units have pushed along the coastal road to Jaffna, which had been cut off from the rest of the island by Tamil Tiger rebels in control of the area to the peninsula's south, the ministry said.

"The military surge continues with strong determination to liberate the strategically important 90-kilometre (56-mile) coastal stretch," the ministry said in a statement.

Military sources said fighting raged overnight in the region with both sides suffering casualties, though no details were available.

Jaffna, an area of 2,300 square kilometres (900 square miles) was taken from the Tigers in 1995, but the lack of land access meant that it has had to be supplied via expensive sea and air routes.

President Mahinda Rajapakse last week urged the Tigers to sur-

render, saying they would be brought to their knees unless they stopped fighting.

But the pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website said on Sunday the Tigers had reiterated their own long-standing appeal for a truce.

The political leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), B. Nadesan, said they had always wanted a truce, adding it was the government that formally pulled out of a moribund Norwegian-arranged truce in January.

Rebel resistance and monsoon rains have slowed the Sri Lankan military's ongoing offensive to take Kiliyochchi, the political capital of the LTTE.

War planes on Sunday bombed a suspected Tamil Tiger command centre and artillery gun positions, the defence ministry said, as ground troops kept up attacks.

Tens of thousands of people have died on both sides of the conflict since 1972, when the LTTE launched its campaign to carve out an independent state in the Sinhalese-majority island of 20 million people.

Meanwhile, one of Sri Lanka's

holiest Catholic shrines stands idle and neglected -- an unlikely victim of a decades-long internal conflict that the government says it is close to winning.

Standing two feet (60 centimetres) tall, the 450-year-old pale yellow statue of the Virgin Mary, draped in golden robes, is especially revered by child-less couples desperately wanting offspring.

But, protected in a bullet-proof case at the Ave Maria church in Madhu, deep inside the northern coastal district of Mannar, pilgrims no longer visit, as mainly-Buddhist Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict rages nearby.

"Seeing this place so empty is a terrible tragedy for me," said Father Emilianuspillai Santhiappillai, the shrine's administrator, who fled clutching the statue in April, before returning with a handful of others in August.

The thousands who used to visit the cream-coloured church each year and stay in chalets have been replaced by wild monkeys, while birds, stray cattle, dogs and an occasional jungle fowl roam the expansive church garden.

## Sharif, Zardari join hands against terror

THE DAILY TIMES, Islamabad

President Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif agreed to join hands to tackle terrorism and the economic crisis in a meeting on Saturday.

Sources privy to the meeting said Zardari, who hosted a dinner at the President's House, told Nawaz that the economic woes coupled with growing militancy were threatening Pakistan's stability.

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and his wife, Zardari's sister Faryal Talpur, and Nawaz's wife Kulsoom Nawaz accompanied them.

Zardari sought the opposition PML-N's co-operation on dealing with the problems, and said he believed there was a need for collective efforts to meet the challenges Pakistan was facing. Nawaz assured the president of his party's support and said the PML-N was committed to the Charter of Democracy.

He also reminded Zardari of his promise to repeal the 17th Constitutional Amendment and

restore the judiciary in line with the Muree Declaration.

The PML-N chief said his party, the largest opposition party in parliament, would never destabilise the democratic set-up, but would rather help the government thwart any such move.

Earlier, Nawaz held a consultative meeting with top PML-N leaders at the Punjab House. He said solution to Pakistan's problems lied in supremacy of the constitution, writ of law and the independence of judiciary.

The PML-N chief said the government should consult all stakeholders to formulate an economic policy and should not rely on foreign aid.

Regarding government's plan to seek loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nawaz said the government should discuss the conditions linked to the loan in parliament.

He said those who had robbed the country should be held accountable. Nawaz also said the government should review the reasons behind terrorism in the country.



PHOTO: AFP  
US President-elect Barack Obama and his wife Michelle leave Splaggia restaurant after having dinner on Saturday in Chicago, Illinois.

Hu, Obama discuss China-US relations

AFP, Beijing

Beijing and Washington should "accommodate each other's concerns." Chinese President Hu Jintao told US president-elect Barack Obama in a phonecall that stressed good Sino-US ties, state media said Sunday.

Hu and Obama spoke Saturday, with the Chinese leader calling for cooperation on issues such as the current global financial turmoil but also urging US respect for Chinese positions on touchy issues such as Taiwan, Xinhua news agency said.

The conversation is thought to be the pair's first since Obama's election victory last week, with Hu becoming the latest world leader to get acquainted with the man whose election has been welcomed worldwide.

"Hu pointed out that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries 30 years ago, bilateral relations have generally kept developing despite setbacks," the report said.

The report did not say how long they spoke for or who initiated the call. However, Obama has been busy calling world leaders who had sent written congratulations on his defeat of Republican John McCain.

## Indian troops kill 11 rebels in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian security forces shot dead 11 suspected Muslim militants in fighting over the weekend in the disputed Kashmir region, police said yesterday.

Five militants were killed in Poonch district, close to the de facto border between India and Pakistan, a police official said, while four others were killed in the southern district of Doda.

Kashmir is in the grip of a 19-year insurgency against New Delhi's rule that has left more than 43,000 people dead by the official count.

Violence has declined since India and Pakistan launched a peace process in 2004 to resolve all pending disputes, including on Kashmir -- a scenic region they hold in part but claim in full.

Earlier thousands of troops were deployed in Indian Kashmir Thursday to prevent a protest rally called by separatist leaders against New Delhi's rule in the Muslim-majority region.

"Heavy deployment has been made in Srinagar and other major towns of the valley to foil the separatist rally," a police official told

Protesters had planned to march to an important mosque in downtown Srinagar, but awoke to tight security with heavily-armed police manning street corners and checking vehicles.

"The Indian police are not allowing anyone out of their homes," said local resident Javid Ahmad, who lives near the mosque.

The police official said no curfew was in place but restrictions on movement had been imposed to "maintain law and order."

Moderate separatist leader Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, who was to lead the rally, criticised the government for crushing the "voice of the people."

"I have been placed under house arrest since yesterday," Farooq, Kashmir's head cleric, told AFP from his residence on the outskirts of the city.

In the past few months, Kashmir has witnessed the biggest pro-independence demonstrations since an insurgency erupted in 1989. The protests have been met with a tough crackdown by Indian security forces.

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INVITATION FOR TENDER					
1 Ministry/Division					Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
2 Agency					ICDDR,B
3 Procuring Entity Name					Executive Director, ICDDR,B
4 Procuring Entity District					Dhaka
5 Invitation for					
Supply, Design, Erection, Construction and Finishing of Light Steel Structure for roofing with Ancillary Works over BSL- 3 Lab Roof					
6 Invitation Ref No & Date					
Memo No. ICDDR,B/Mohakhali/Procurement/08/ Date:					
7 Procurement Method					
Open Tendering Method					
8 Budget and Source of Funds					
IDA through RPA (GoB)					
9 Project (if applicable)					
Vertical Extension and Renovation of Research and Hospital Building – ICDDR,B, Dhaka, Bangladesh					
10 Tender Package Number & Name					
Package No. 37, Supply, Design, Erection, Construction and Finishing of Light Steel Structure for roofing with Ancillary Works over BSL- 3 Lab Roof.					
11 Tender Publication Date					
10 November, 2008					
12 Tender Last Selling Date					
1 December, 2008					
13 Tender Closing Date and Time					
2 December, 2008					
14 Tender Opening Date and Time					
2 December, 2008					
15 Name & Address of the office(s)					
- Selling Tender Document					
Treasury Unit, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Hospital Building, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka.					
- Receiving Tender Document					
Procurement & Materials Office, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka.					
- Opening Tender Document					
Procurement & Materials Office, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka.					
16 Eligibility of					