

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 Kilinochchi, 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 Santhipillai, 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 Yousuf Raza Gilani and his wife, Zardari's sister Farah 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 Murree 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.



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

Hu, Obama discuss China-US relations

AFP, Beijing

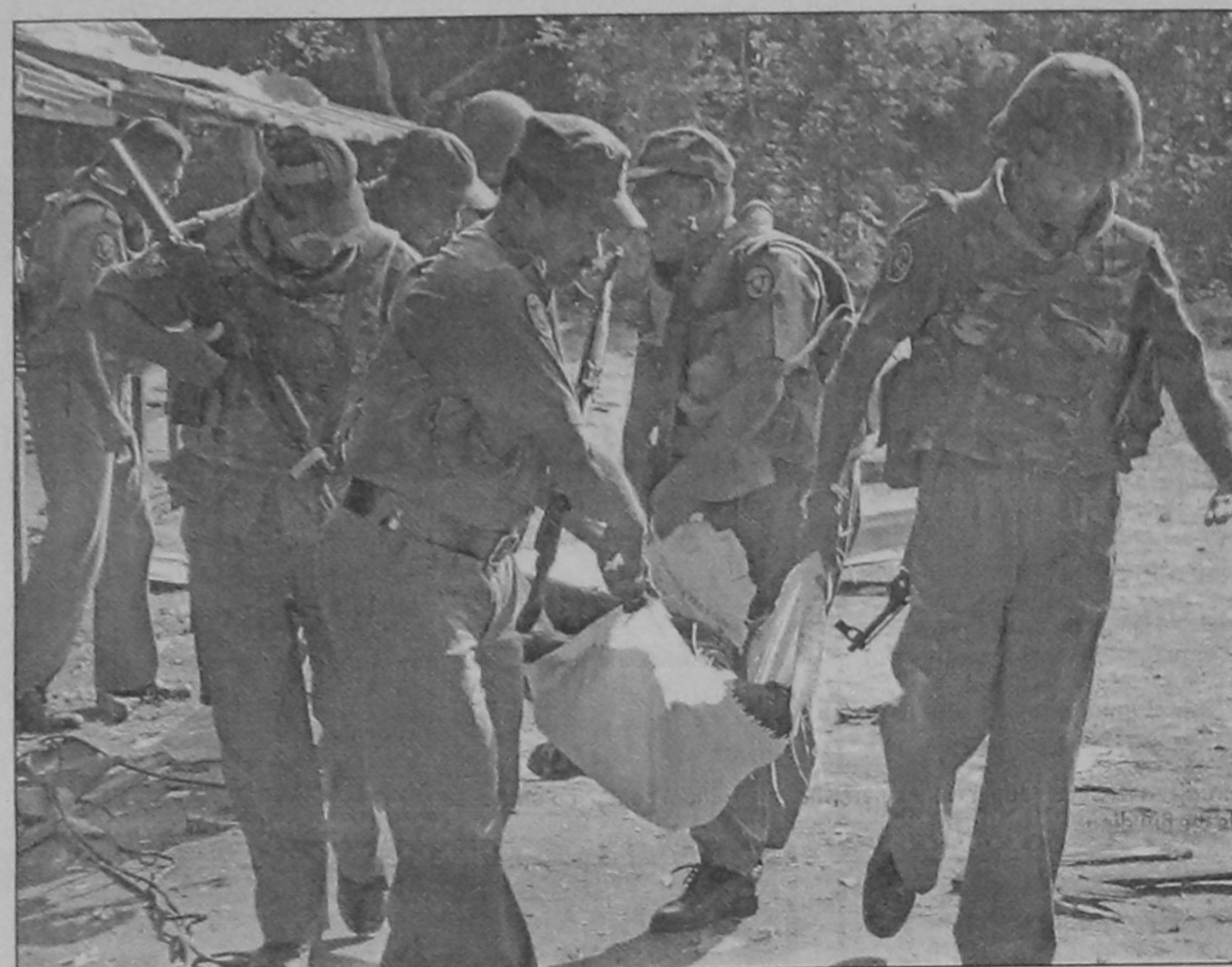
Beijing and Washington should "accommodate each other's concerns," Chinese President Hu Jintao told US president-elect Barack Obama in a phonecall that stressed good Sino-US ties, state media said Sunday.

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.



Sri Lankan police remove the body of a man who died while allegedly handling an explosive device outside a private extra-curricular classroom in the northern town of Vavuniya yesterday. There were no other casualties in the blast, which came as the government forces were locked in combat with Tamil Tiger rebels further north of the island.

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

AFP

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.

Two Spanish soldiers killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Madrid

Two Spanish soldiers were killed and another critically wounded by a suicide bomber in Herat, western Afghanistan, the Spanish Defence Ministry said yesterday.

"Two Spanish soldiers were killed and another was critically wounded in an attack south of Herat," a ministry spokesman said.

Defence Minister Carme Chacon would speak to the media about the incident at noon Sunday, he added.

Earlier Sunday Afghan police said one foreign soldier had been killed and five wounded when a suicide attacker rammed an explosives-filled minivan into a Nato-led convoy.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) confirmed the attack but was unable to give details or nationalities.

Police said the troops involved were Italians. Italy has 2,350 soldiers in Isaf, most of them based in Herat.

Canadian journalist was kept in Afghan cave

AP, Kabul

Afghan kidnappers held a Canadian journalist for four weeks blindfolded in an underground cave in which she could barely stand, the journalist said in a videotape released Sunday.

Melissa Fung, a reporter for the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., said in the video that her captors guarded her in the tiny cave for the first three weeks of her abduction. In the last week, they chained her hands and feet and she was left by herself, she said.

Fung said her captors never hurt her but that she was kept blindfolded.

She was freed Saturday after tribal elders and provincial council members negotiated her release, said Adam Khan Serat, spokesman for the provincial governor in Wardak. Serat said no ransom was paid.

Afghan intelligence agents arrested three people suspected of involvement in the kidnapping, the intelligence agency said.

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/U08/ 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 Time: 11:30 Hours
14	Tender Opening Date and Time	2 December, 2008 Time: 12:00 Hours
15	Name & Address of the office(s)	Address Treasury Unit, 2nd floor, Hospital Building, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka. - Selling Tender Document Procurement & Materials Office, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka. - Receiving Tender Document Procurement & Materials Office, ICDDR,B, Mohakhali, Dhaka. - Opening Tender Document
16	Eligibility of Tenderer	i. The Tenderer should have minimum 3 years of general experience in the supply & erection of Steel Structure roofing. ii. Enlisted in Govt. / Semi- Govt./ Autonomous organization having experience in similar nature of supply and erection of Light Steel Structure roofing works. iii. Certificate regarding satisfactory completion of at least one number of Supply, Design, Erection, Construction and Finishing of Light Steel Structure with Ancillary Roofing Works under Govt. / Semi- Govt./ Autonomous organization (minimum single work order Tk 25 lakh) from the concerned Engineer / Officer not below the rank of Executive Engineer. iv. Bank Solvency Certificate (sanctioned credit line facilities) at least Tk. 25 lakh. iv. Qualified & Experienced Technical Personnel Mechanical, Civil & Sanitary works.
17	Identification of Lots, Tender Security, Completion Time and Price of Tender Document	
	Lot No.	Identification Location Tender Security Amount in BDT (by Pay Order / Bank Guarantee) Completion Time Price of Tender Document (in cash)
	Package-37	Supply, Design, Erection, Construction and Finishing of Light Steel Structure for roofing with Ancillary Works over BSL-3 Lab Roof ICDDR,B 68, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahamed Sarani Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212 Bangladesh Tk.35,000.00 (Taka thirty five thousand) in the form of Pay Order, Bank Draft or Bank Guarantee in favor of ICDDR,B, Dhaka from any scheduled Bank of Bangladesh 90 (ninety) days from date of award of Contract. Tk. 2000.00
18	Name of Official Inviting Tender	M. Alam
19	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Procurement Specialist, Gyanaloy Project, ICDDR,B, 68, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sharani, Mohakhali, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
20	Address of Official Inviting Tender	Mohakhali, Dhaka, Bangladesh
21	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Tel: (8802)8860523-32 Fax: (8802)9860620 e.mail malam@icddr.org
22	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders.	

M. Alam
Procurement Specialist,
Gyanaloy Project

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