

## Lanka troops kill 30 civilians in 'safe zone'

Seize rebel command centre

AP, AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan military shelled a village and a makeshift hospital inside a government-declared "safe zone" for civilians in the north yesterday, killing at least 30 people and injuring scores of others, local health officials and a rebel-linked Web site said.

The military denied hitting the hospital and said it was taking precautions to protect civilians. The TamilNet Web site said at least 66 civilians had been killed by government shellings since Tuesday.

Human rights groups have accused the rebels of forcing civilians to stay in the area to act as human shields, a charge the rebels deny.

Meanwhile, the military announced the capture of a building the rebels had used as their main operations centre in their fight against the advancing army.

With the government's offensive against the Tamil Tigers escalating, international aid

groups are increasingly concerned about the safety of the hundreds of thousands of civilians reportedly living inside the shrinking pocket of rebel-held territory in the northeast.

Security forces found briefing rooms containing detailed maps at the facility in the district of Mullaitivu, where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been penned in after a series of battlefield defeats.

"We have captured the main LTTE command centre in Dharmapuram," army spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said, adding that troops were conducting clearance operations in the area.

He said soldiers also found a communications room within the complex, but the guerrillas had dismantled the equipment and removed it as troops moved in on Wednesday.

"We think it is a very significant place because they had maps of our brigade-level camps," Nanayakkara said. "This must have been a key centre they used."



PHOTO: AFP

This picture taken on December 10, 2008 shows cholera victims laying in a hospital ward at the Budiriro Polyclinic in Harare. The cholera death toll in Zimbabwe has soared to 2,755, with 48,623 people suspected to be infected, according to latest World Health Organization statistics published yesterday.

## US, Afghan forces kill 30 insurgents

AP, AFP, Kabul

Afghan and international forces said yesterday they had killed around 30 militants in Afghanistan, 22 of them in Nato air strikes after a patrol was attacked near the Pakistan border.

Separately, US coalition troops killed eight Taliban fighters during a raid on militants blamed for roadside bomb attacks in southern Afghanistan, a coalition statement said.

The fighting comes at a time when the US and Nato and Afghan troops are trying

to turn the tide against the Taliban-led violence, which was at an all-time high in 2008 with insurgent attacks up 30 percent from the year before. Militants have turned the lawless tribal region between Afghanistan and Pakistan into a sanctuary from which they launch attacks in both countries.

Nato Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speaking in neighboring Pakistan, said the new troops will take the fight to "places where it was not, or insufficiently, possible up till now."

### NEWS ANALYSIS

## Indian parties mull over future allegiances

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

With elections to Lok Sabha round the corner, it is time for political allegiances and loyalties to shift.

In North India's key state of Uttar Pradesh, which sends the largest number 80 members to Lok Sabha, former senior BJP leader Kalyan Singh not only quit the party but announced he would campaign for Samajwadi Party (SP) led by Mulayam Singh Yadav in the coming parliamentary polls. Kalyan Singh, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, also got his son Rajiv Singh to join Samajwadi Party, which promptly appointed the latter as its general secretary.

On the other hand, in southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, a crop of regional parties Telugum Desam Party, Telangana Rashtriya Samiti and Left parties are on the verge of formalizing an alliance to take on the state's ruling Congress in the coming poll. Andhra Pradesh will witness parliamentary polls to 42 seats and elections to the state legislature simultaneously.

The question in political circles is why has Samajwadi Party, which has traditionally wooed Muslim votes, joined hands with Kalyan Singh who was the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister when the Babri Masjid was demolished in the state in

December 1992?

Analysts point out that by aligning with Kalyan Singh, the Samajwadi Party is eyeing the votes of Lodhi Rajput community to which he belongs. The community comprises a little less than three per cent of the votes in Uttar Pradesh and it has traditionally voted for BJP. A shift in its allegiance is expected to help Samajwadi Party, analysts say.

The new alignment of forces has left India's ruling Congress faced with the task of choosing between Samajwadi Party-Kalyan Singh alliances or going it alone in Uttar Pradesh.

An influential section of Congress favours a rethink continuing the alliance with Samajwadi Party in the wake of the latter's tie-up with Kalyan Singh, Congress sources say.

Although it was a BJP government in Uttar Pradesh when Babri Masjid was demolished, the then federal government of Congress headed by late P V Narasimha Rao was also accused of failing to prevent the demolition, analysts say.

Several Congress leaders are wary of the political cost of having a tie up with Samajwadi Party-Kalyan Singh tango, Congress sources say.

What will Congress do: will it break off the alliance with Samajwadi Party or overlook the latter's tie-up with Kalyan Singh saying it has direct ties only with SP and not with Kalyan Singh or embrace both SP and Kalyan

Singh? It is no doubt a difficult choice for Congress because any division of votes among Congress and SP will only help Uttar Pradesh's ruling Bahujan Samaj Party headed by Mayawati, say analysts.

Officially, Congress spokesperson Jayanthi Natarajan dodged a question on the possible fall-out of alliance between SP and Kalyan Singh saying it was too early to comment.

In Andhra Pradesh, Congress

is keeping a close watch on the political developments relating to the alliance taking shape between TDP headed by N Chandrababu Naidu, TRS led by former federal minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and Left parties because such a tie-up has the potential to trouble Congress in that state, analysts say.

It is after a break of eight years that Chandrasekhar Rao is trying to patch up with TDP, the party he had quit in 2001 to float

TRS focussing on movement for a separate Telangana state to be carved out of Andhra Pradesh.

The TRS had fought the previous parliamentary polls in the state in 2004 in alliance with Congress and won five of the 42 seats. But TRS withdrew from Congress-led UPA combine at the Centre charging Prime Minister Manmohan Singh government with having not kept its promise on the Telangana statehood issue.

## NATO chief praises Pakistan's fight against extremism

AFP, Islamabad

Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer held talks with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in Islamabad yesterday on the regional situation and security along the Afghan border, officials said.

The talks were focused on "border security, Nato supplies, (and the) general regional situation," a presidential aide told AFP.

The government has always stressed that "a secure and stable Afghanistan is vital to Pakistan," the aide said.

A foreign ministry official said that de Hoop Scheffer is also expected to meet Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Defence Minister Ahmed Mukhtar.

US and Nato officials say Pakistan's rugged northwest

tribal belt has become a safe haven for militants linked to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda who fled from neighbouring Afghanistan after the 2001 US-led invasion.

Nato leads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), made up of more than 51,000 troops from nearly 40 countries, which is assisting Afghan government forces in the fight against an escalating Taliban-led insurgency.

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PHOTO: AFP

This December 1, 2008 file photo shows Susan Rice during a press conference at the Hilton Hotel in Chicago. Rice, US President Barack Obama's nominee to be the US ambassador to the United Nations, won approval Wednesday from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a panel spokesman said. The move sets the stage for the full Senate to vote on the nomination of Rice, who would become the first African-American woman to hold the job and would enjoy cabinet rank, meaning she would report directly to Obama. No date for such a vote has been set.

### Communications Manager

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