
Sri Lankan highway opened for traffic after 24 years

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Colombo (IANS) Sri Lanka's northern highway that links Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the island was opened Monday for military traffic after 24 long years, military sources said. Two convoys of soldiers - one group going home on leave from Jaffna and the other going to Jaffna after finishing leave - met each other on the way and exchanged greetings on the A-9 Jaffna-Kandy highway.

'Forty lorries carrying troops for Anuradhapura and Jaffna met each other on the way,' a military source said Monday. Authorities said the highway would open for public when the landmines in the former Tamil Tiger area are cleared and the roads reconstructed. The government also plans to resume the lucrative railway service to the country's north. Trains from Colombo now ply only up to Vavuniya town, which is located far south of Jaffna. Overland supplies to over 40,000 troops in Jaffna peninsula remained cut off for 24 years as some 75 km stretch of the highway was in areas held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The troops in Jaffna would no longer be relying on supplies through air and sea routes. The highway had been briefly opened for civil movement after the February 2002 Norway-brokered ceasefire agreement between Colombo and the LTTE. Holding control of the road between Omanthai in Vavuniya district and Muhamalai in Jaffna district, the guerrillas imposed tax on passengers and goods going through the highway, making millions of rupees daily. The opening of the route became possible after former rebel strongholds along the highway, including Mankulam, Kilinochchi, Paranthan and Elephant Pass, were recaptured after months of fierce fighting since the dawn of 2009. According to the military, the rebels, who once presided over major parts of the north and east till 2006, are now cornered in a stretch of land measuring about 50 square km in Mullaitivu district. Indo Asian News Service
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