
Sri Lanka captures key crossroads from rebels

Wednesday, 04 March 2009

Last Updated Wednesday, 04 March 2009

The Associated PressColombo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan troops captured a key crossroads outside the last rebel-held town Tuesday after fierce fighting with Tamil Tiger guerrillas, the military said. The capture of the junction outside the town of Puthukkudiyiruppu came as government forces battled to destroy the rebel group and end the country's 25-year-old civil war.

The intense battle over the crossroads killed scores of rebels, the defense ministry said in a statement. It did not give government casualties, in keeping with recent government policy. With most communication to the north severed, the rebels were not available for comment. The military said last week it had entered the outskirts of Puthukkudiyiruppu and was battling to force the rebels from the town. The capture of the town, where fighting continued, would confine the rebels — along with tens of thousands of trapped civilians — to a few villages and a small strip of coastland in the northeast. Meanwhile, a female rebel suicide bomber detonates her explosives near advancing troops Monday, causing minor injuries to the soldiers, the military said in a statement. Troops scouring the area for hidden weapons uncovered a cache that included torpedoes, hundreds of hand grenades, outboard motors and 1,000 body bags, the military said. As the war drags on, the rebel-linked TamilNet Web site said that the plight of tens of thousands of civilians trapped in the war zone was growing dire. It said 45 civilians were killed by government artillery fire Monday and scores more were killed over the weekend. The government denies attacking civilians in its offensive. Human Rights Watch said last week that an estimated 2,000 civilians had been killed in the recent fighting. TamilNet said food was growing scarce and some children were contracting skin rashes. The rebels have been fighting since 1983 for an independent state for minority Tamils. More than 70,000 people have been killed in the fighting. Courtesy: iht.com