
US releases satellite photos of Sri Lankan war

Wednesday, 22 April 2009

Last Updated Wednesday, 22 April 2009

By Desmond Butler WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department released satellite imagery Tuesday of tens of thousands of Sri Lankan civilians squeezed into the last small strip of land controlled by Tamil Tiger rebels. The State Department said that a recent image shows about 25,000 tents packed into a coastal strip about 8 square miles large. Based on the number of tents, they estimate that about 125,000 people were in the conflict zone before about 60,000 civilians escaped over the last two days.

Human rights groups say the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are holding many people in the enclave against their will and using them as human shields. Those groups have also accused the government of indiscriminate shelling in the region. Both sides deny the allegations. Thousands of civilians also fled in packed small boats, and they were picked up by navy patrols and transported to camps where Tamils who have escaped the war are being held. More than 2,000 people in about 100 boats were picked up Monday. The U.N. and others have called for a negotiated truce to allow civilians to leave the rebel-held coastal strip. But the Sri Lankan government has refused to heed those international pleas to halt the fighting, saying it is on the verge of crushing the separatists and putting an end to the 25-year-old war. The U.S. government appears to agree with that assessment. "We see the potential for major developments in the next 48 hours," said Michael Owen, acting deputy assistant secretary of state. The State Department urged the Sri Lankan government to exercise restraint. Earlier, State Department spokesman Robert Wood said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is considering how the U.S. can help Sri Lanka rebuild and move forward once the civil conflict is settled. Courtesy:google.com