

Sri Lankan troops seize rebel territory

The Sri Lanka government soldiers Sunday seized an area from the Tamil Tiger rebels in the country's north following several days of fierce fighting, a defence ministry statement said.

The advancing troops Sunday took control of the Mannar area, also called 'Rice Bowl', after days of heavy fighting between the government troops and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the statement said.

The area is about 120 sq km, which is mainly used for paddy cultivation.

The capture of the 'Rice Bowl' and adjacent areas would stop the LTTE from using the 12 km stretch of the Mannar-Pooneryn main road and a 13-km coastal stretch in the region.

In July last year, the government soldiers took control of the entire Eastern Province from the LTTE.

The troops are currently battling the LTTE in the north with the aim of crushing the rebel group before the end of 2008.

The LTTE has been fighting against the government since the mid-1980s to establish an independent homeland for the island's minority Tamils, which led to the death of more than 70,000 people.

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