

38 killed in Sri Lanka's fresh clashes: Military

At least 37 Tamil Tiger guerrillas and a soldier were killed while 37 from both sides were wounded when advancing troops and the rebels engaged in fierce clashes Friday in the northern Wanni region, the defence ministry said here Saturday.

It said the troops in the northeastern Weli-Oya region had moved forward and captured a key rebel base, named 'Michael Base', along with underground bunkers at Janakapura north of Weli-Oya Friday.

'Security forces personnel staged a multi-pronged offensive to liberate Wanni from LTTE clutches killed 37 terrorists and injured 16 more during clashes on July 4,' a defence ministry statement Saturday said.

Noting that another 17 rebels were 'either killed or wounded', it said that a soldier was also killed and four more wounded during these clashes.

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels.

The ministry, in a separate report, said Saturday that with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) facilitation, troops have allowed 18 seriously ill patients from the rebel-held Wanni areas to enter the government-held areas through the Omanthai entry/exit point for medical treatment, despite the temporary closure of the Omanthai gateway.

The Omanthai entry/exit point to the rebel-held Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu district from the Vavuniya end faced closure Tuesday after the ICRC, which monitors and facilitates the smooth transportation through this point, temporarily pulled out from the area, citing security reasons.

'Within the last three days alone, the troops have coordinated the transport of 18 terminally ill patients from un-cleared areas into the government controlled areas, despite the temporary closure still in effect. Nine members of the medical staff have also accompanied those patients on all three days,' the ministry said.

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