

Jets pounding LTTE battlefield fortifications: Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan Air Force jets Saturday carried out at least nine air raids 'targeting LTTE battlefield fortifications' as ground troops advancing in several directions were locked in fierce fighting with the Tamil Tigers on the outskirts of Kilinochchi, the rebels' political capital till recently, defence authorities here said.

'Fighter aircraft pounded nine occasions on LTTE targets located between Paranthan west and Kilinochchi south today from 6.30 a.m.,' the Media Centre for National Security (MCNS) said.

The air raids 'inflicted heavy losses to LTTE terrorists and buildings', the MCNS said, adding that a senior female LTTE cadre was confirmed to have been among those killed.

Air force spokesman Wing Commander Janaka Nanayakkara said the air raids were carried out in support of ground troops battling the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the outskirts of Kilinochchi.

'These air raids were aimed at destroying the enemy defence lines, neutralising their resistance and prevent them from regrouping. The pilots have confirmed that the targets were accurately hit,' Nanayakkara told IANS Saturday.

The fresh air raids have come at a time when the troops were said to be operating on the outskirts of Kilinochchi town, 350 km north of here.

The defence ministry said the ground troops 'are steadily approaching Kilinochchi from the west and the south', after having captured Thursday yet another rebel stronghold of Thirumurikandy, located a few kilometers south of Kilinochchi.

'Heavy clashes prevailed in the area during the last couple of days as the terrorists gave heavy resistance to the soldiers marching in,' the ministry said.

In a separate report, the ministry said the troops advancing towards the rebels' military heartland of Mullaitivu 'are now entering into the Mullaitivu suburbs after successfully clearing away the LTTE hold in the Nagacholai forest reserve'.

There was no immediate reaction from the LTTE, which has been fighting against the Sri Lankan state to carve out a separate state for Tamils in the northern and eastern parts of the island for a quarter century.

Thousands have died in escalating fighting since late 2005.

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