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Sri Lankan troops attacked



Renewed fighting in the northern Jaffna peninsula

At least 24 people have killed in renewed clashes between Tamil Tiger rebels and government forces in Sri Lanka even as President Chandrika Kumaratunga called for peace.

Sri Lankan defence authorities said Tamil rebels ambushed a military vehicle in the northern district of Vavuniya, killing four soldiers and wounding 15.

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Rebels also attacked military defence lines in the northern Jaffna peninsula, killing at least one soldier and wounding 33.

Government troops killed 15 rebels in retaliation.

Heavy fighting has been continuing in Jaffna for nearly

three weeks as the Tigers attempt to recapture their former stronghold.

Landmine attack

In the Vavuniya attack, rebels set off a landmine as a military convoy drove through the area.

"The troops had been on a search operation and the explosion occurred when they were returning to base," military spokesman Brigadier Palitha Fernando is quoted as saying by Reuters news agency.

Meanwhile, government troops and Tamil rebels exchanged mortar and artillery fire in renewed fighting in the Jaffna peninsula.

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Both sides are fighting to gain control of a strategic road that links Jaffna to the rest of the country.

A navy patrol also sank a rebel boat off the eastern port city of Trincomalee killing three rebels, a defense ministry statement said.

Peace call

On Thursday, eight people were killed and more than 50 injured in a grenade attack at a concert venue in the north-east.

The attack took place during celebrations over the Sri Lankan New Year.

It came as President Chandrika Kumaratunga made an appeal for an end to two decades of fighting in which more than 50,000 people have been killed.

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