

Indefinite hartal, curfew paralyse Jaffna (Sri Lanka)

An indefinite hartal called by the LTTE's front organisations, and a 16-hour curfew imposed by the district authorities brought life to a standstill in Jaffna on Monday.

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Called by one of LTTE's shadowy front organisations, the hartal means that banks, schools, trading establishments and government offices will be shut indefinitely.

Only hospitals and water and power supply departments will be exempted from the hartal.

Army authorities in Colombo said that till 12 pm, Jaffna was trouble free, except for the discovery of a Claymore mine in Nellyyadi. It was defused.

"The closure of banks is going to hit the people hard because 70 per cent of the population of Jaffna depends on remittances from abroad," he added.

The LTTE has told the people of Jaffna that a war is imminent, in view of the assaults on the Tamils, allegedly by the Sri Lankan armed forces and their "Tamil paramilitaries."

Notices put up by the shadowy "Pongi Elum Makkal Padai" (Rising Peoples' Army) have warned that Sri Lankan army posts and camps are going to be attacked, and that the people living around them should leave for safer places forthwith.

The notice had been reproduced in the pro-LTTE Tamil website www.sankathi.com.

The Rising Peoples' Army has highlighted the killing of five Tamil youth in Puthur, seven in Vadamarachchi, and two in the office of the Uthayan daily in Jaffna.

Traders create shortages

The war-like situation in Jaffna is being exploited by the trading community, which has started hoarding essential commodities, local residents say.

"The price of petrol has gone by 50 per cent. A litre of petrol now goes for SLRs 160 or SLRs 170. Milk powder is up by 20 per cent," one resident said.

Traders, on the other hand, are complaining of a sharp fall in business.

In the main market at Stanley Road, turnover has come down from SLRs 30 million to SLRs 2 million a day, a source said.

The uncertain situation has brought all repair and construction work to a stop, throwing masons and others out of job.

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[<<< zurück zu: News](#)
