

Sri Lankan plane goes down; rebels blamed as 62 killed. (1995, November 23). *The Gazette*.

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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Soldiers sealed off the only supply route to the main Tamil rebel stronghold of Jaffna city yesterday, Sri Lankan military officials said.

Also yesterday, a military plane carrying 59 troops and three crew crashed into the Indian Ocean. The government blamed the rebels for downing the plane.

The loss of the aircraft raised a death toll that has grown rapidly since the government launched its offensive against Tamil separatists last month. At least 2,000 people have been killed since the military campaign began Oct. 17.

Government troops nearly surrounded Jaffna city and the capture of the supply road to the east will force rebels holed up there to cross the Jaffna Kilali Lagoon if they want to flee, officials said on condition of anonymity.

Late yesterday, the military declared the lagoon a prohibited zone and said civilians who want to go in boats across the choppy waters must first get the permission of the military area commander. Violators can be shot.

Most of Jaffna city's 120,000 Tamil civilians fled the area in the past three weeks. It's not known how many rebels remained behind to defend their redoubt.

The weather was clear yesterday when the AN-32 military transport plane went down off Jaffna Peninsula.

Military officials became alarmed when the plane, which took off from the capital of Colombo, did not land 70 minutes later at the Palali military base in the northern Jaffna Peninsula. They later confirmed it had crashed into the ocean.

Navy gunboats scoured the sea for the three-member crew, 54 soldiers and five pilots who were aboard the aircraft.

The Tamil Tiger rebels have been fighting for 12 years for an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east. The rebels accuse the majority Sinhalese of widespread discrimination.

Government troops entered Jaffna city on Monday for the first time in five years. House-to-house battles continued yesterday.

At least 49 guerrillas and a soldier were killed yesterday.

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