

'Desperate' Tamil rebels massacre 24 villagers. (1995, October 27)
The Toronto star.

THE TORONTO STAR Friday, October 27, 1995 A21

'Desperate' Tamil rebels massacre 24 villagers

'Brutal acts' seen as bid to ward off Sri Lankan army offensive

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (Reuter-AP) — With guns, knives and long-handled machetes, Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger guerrillas massacred 24 Sinhalese villagers yesterday in a desperate attempt to ward off a major army push, the military said.

"The terrorists are desperate because they can't face our army in Jaffna," a military spokesperson told a news conference. "They are resorting to brutal acts of terrorism and attacking innocent men, women and children."

He said 500 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had been killed and more than 1,500 wounded in the army's latest offensive in Jaffna, the rebels' northern stronghold.

Hospitals in the Jaffna peninsula and the northern mainland under rebel control were full of their wounded, he added.

K. Ponnambalam, the top government administrator in Jaffna, said that 10 civilians were killed when air force jets bombed Jaffna city yesterday.

Ponnambalam is currently in Colombo to organize government food supplies to Jaffna, but is under the control of the Tiger rebels when he returns to the peninsula.

The army spokesperson said maximum possible precautions were taken to avoid civilian casualties in the offensive and that the military regretted it if civilians did get hurt by accident.

He said 24 villagers were hacked to death or shot in yesterday's dawn rebel raid on two remote villages and that the death toll could rise.

At least 10 other people were wounded when the rebels rampaged through the Tammanne-wa and Herath Hammillewa villages, about 200 kilometres from the capital of Colombo, the spokesperson said.

He earlier put the death toll at 36 and said it could possibly rise to 100.

Seven children, including a 6-day-old baby, were among the

dead, a witness said. Rebels set fire to some huts before fleeing into the jungle.

The villages lie in Welioya district, the heart of the conflict, lodged between government and Tiger controlled areas, where Sinhalese villages are under continual threat from the guerrilla group, fighting for independence in the north and east.

The government says more than 50,000 people have died in the 12-year war.

"The terrorists started firing at about 4:30 a.m. The killing went on for two hours," said survivor Nimal Senanayake. "We escaped only because we ran and hid in the jungle. The army and police were nowhere to be seen."

Yesterday's attack, in which police said the Tamil Tigers used guns, knives and "katties," long-handled machetes, was the fifth of its kind since Saturday.

The rebels slaughtered 90 villagers, mostly Sinhalese, including infants, in separate raids on remote hamlets in the east and northeast during the weekend.