

Rebel massacre 66: Sri Lanka. (1995, October 22) *The Gazette Montreal.*

WORLD



A Sri Lankan policeman takes cover and shoots at Tamil rebels hiding in a swamp as smoke billows from one of the two oil depots where fires continued to rage in Colombo yesterday.

Rebels massacre 66: Sri Lanka

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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Tamil rebels carried out their deadliest attack on civilians in years yesterday, a day after they blew up storage tanks at the country's two main oil depots.

Military officials say the rebels attacked three villages in northeastern Sri Lanka. At least 66 civilians were reported killed.

The victims were from the majority Sinhalese group, whom the Tamils claim discriminate against them. The rebels have been fighting for a homeland for 12 years.

A military spokesman, Major Tilak Dunuwille, said the attack was an attempt to divert the military from its offensive in the north, now in its fifth day.

More than 35,000 soldiers are pushing toward Jaffna Peninsula, a rebel stronghold, 300 kilometres north of Colombo.

The military said at least 93 soldiers and 257 rebels have been killed, including four soldiers and 106 rebels killed in a battle yesterday.

There was no independent confirmation as all communication links to the north have broken down due to the fighting.

The military said the battle occurred near Achchelu village and involved government tanks, warplanes and gunboats.

On Friday, rebels blew up storage tanks at the country's two main oil depots in Colombo, the capital. Twenty-six people died in fighting at the depots on

Friday, and gun battles continued yesterday, killing three civilians in the crossfire.

The government said two rebels have been arrested and two have surrendered. Authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew in Colombo to prevent mobs of Sinhalese from looting shops and houses of Tamils.

Black plumes of smoke rose from the depots as fire fighters struggled to contain the blaze, which sent thousands of people fleeing in panic. Firefighters from neighboring India have come to help battle the flames.

The massacre yesterday was the biggest Tamil rebel assault on civilians since 1992 when 166 Muslims were killed in a north-central village.

Thirty-one bodies — including men, women and children — were found shot and hacked to death in Bowatte, 200 kilometres east of Colombo, the military spokesman, Dunuwille, said. Eleven people were injured.

In Kolakanawadiya, 225 km northeast of Colombo, at least 19 people were killed in another attack, police said.

And in Mangalagama, 200 km east of Colombo, at least 16 villagers, including five children, were killed in an attack at 2 a.m.

Almost 36,000 people have been killed since the rebels began their campaign for a Tamil homeland in 1983.

Tamils, who make up 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people, claim they suffer discrimination from the majority Sinhalese, who control the government and the military.

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