

Govt. gears up with more fire power and troops for war. (1994, May 1). *Lanka news.*

Sri Lanka's armed forces are buying more modern weapons and recruiting fresh troops to fight Tamil Tiger separatist guerrillas under a major reorganisation plan, defence officials said.

"We're re-equipping and re-organising the security forces," a senior military officer said. "The idea is to streamline the military and give it more teeth."

Last month, teams of senior military officers visited Russia, the United Kingdom and Israel after shopping in China and South Africa for armoured vehicles, gunboats and aircraft, he said.

The navy last month signed a deal with China, Sri Lanka's main arms supplier, for a new warship, two gunboats and a badly-needed landing craft to

supply isolated military bases in the island's rebel-controlled north.

The air force has ordered more transport helicopters, and the sources said more patrol boats were needed to cut off the Tigers' overseas supplies of arms. The sources said the army was also creating more divisions to streamline command and control, and acquiring more armoured fighting vehicles to give

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Probable buy - the "Harimau" an armoured vehicle

troops greater battlefield mobility.

Military sources said they needed more firepower and numbers because the Tigers fighting for independence in the north and east are stronger than ever.

"Now we can't do brigade-sized operations with just three infantry battalions in Jaffna," a senior army officer said. "The Tigers are too strong. We need at least a three-brigade task force."

"We also need more firepower to win the land battle," said the senior army officer. "Tanks are good, but they can't be used in built-up areas. So more air power would be more effective."

Sri Lanka now spends about 20 billion rupees (\$408 million) a year fighting the rebels. More than 30,000 people have died in the fighting.

The country's 120,000-strong armed forces are also recruiting more troops after suffering serious losses to the rebels. The army began recruiting the first of up to 10,000 more troops it plans to take into its approximately 90,000-troop force.

It is also considering creating three new major-general posts and upgrading the army's commander's rank to general from lieutenant-general.

Last November the guerrillas inflicted the military's worst defeat in the decade-old war when they overran a key base in the northern rebel

stronghold of Jaffna, killing or capturing over 600 soldiers and sailors. The rebels lost 400 to 600 of their own men. There has been a lull since then while both sides licked their wounds and regrouped. Military sources said they believe the lull indicates the 6,000- to 10,000-strong Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels could be planning another attack, possibly on a northern air or naval base.

But last year's setbacks also prompted the military to delay major offensives and emphasize the training of troops, previously churned out of training centres to meet the demand for numbers, the sources said.

Hand-picked officers are now giving refresher training to army infantry battalions at the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare centre at the Maduru Oya base bordering the eastern province.