

7 rebels killed on eve of Sri Lankan vote. (1994, November 09). *The Island*.

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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka – A day before presidential elections that will decide whether the government will pursue peace talks with separatist rebels, the navy killed at least seven insurgents in a sea battle.

Thousands of people jammed train and bus stations yesterday in the capital, Colombo, to return to their towns and villages to vote.

Election officials distributed ballots and policemen armed with assault rifles escorted officials to polling booths to prepare for the balloting. Bomb disposal squads were on alert.

The two main presidential contenders are Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition candidate Srima Dissanayake, who took her husband's place in the race after he was assassinated Oct. 24.

Kumaratunga started talks with Tamil Tiger rebels last month and wants them to continue; Dissanayake wants to halt the talks.

The government suspended the talks after Gamini Dissanayake's assassination. Police suspect the attack was carried out by Tamil Tigers, who have been fighting for a homeland in the north and east since 1983.

In a battle yesterday, military officials said three rebel boats were intercepted as they were about to attack a naval landing craft in the Bay of Bengal.

Two sailors were wounded in an exchange of fire and two rebel boats were blown up. The bodies of seven rebels were recovered.

More than 34,000 people have been killed in Sri Lanka's civil war since 1983. Tamils make up 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 17 million people, and say they face discrimination from the Sinhalese, who make up 75 per cent of the population.