

Sri Lankans defy Tamil boycott to vote. (1988, November 20). *The Ottawa Citizen*.

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— AP photo

Indian soldier mans a machine-gun Saturday as Sri Lankans line up to vote

Sri Lankans defy Tamil boycott to vote

BATTICALOA (AP) — An estimated 240,000 Sri Lankans defied a boycott called by a powerful Tamil guerrilla group and voted Saturday in the Eastern Province to choose members to a local administrative council.

Indian soldiers provided heavy security around the polling centres to prevent attacks by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Tamil militia that threatened to disrupt the voting.

There were no reports of violence during the voting but a Sri Lankan military official said two Indian soldiers were killed Friday when Tamil gunmen attacked four

police stations in the region.

Deputy election commissioner Lakshman Perera said an estimated 40 per cent of the 600,000 voters in the region cast their ballots. The polls are for 35 seats on a council joining the multi-ethnic Eastern Province with the predominantly-Tamil Northern Province.

The 36 seats in the north were won unopposed by two Tamil groups that supported an India-sponsored peace accord aimed at ending the five-year-old war for an independent Tamil homeland.

At least 8,500 people have been killed in the separatist war.

The accord, signed in July 1987, provided for the setting up of semi-autonomous provincial councils to appease the Tamil demand for self-rule. But the Liberation Tigers, the largest and most powerful Tamil militia, rejected the plan, saying it fell below expectations.

The Liberation Tigers denounced the Tamil groups participating in the polls as traitors and said the elections were an Indian propaganda ploy.

Sri Lanka's 16 million people. The mainly Hindu Tamils make up about 18 per cent of the population.