

World

Violence mars Sri Lanka election

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (DPA) — Preliminary results from Saturday's North-East Provincial Council elections showed a defeat for the island nation's ruling party.

Election violence was stepped up Sunday by Tamil and Sinhalese rebels opposed to the peace accord between India and Sri Lanka.

Election officials said tallies indicated the Tamil and Moslem parties won 17 each of 35 seats of the three eastern districts of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai. The ruling United National Party won only one seat.

The North-East Provincial Council is to comprise 71 seats. The other 36 seats, in northern Sri Lanka, went to candidates of the Tamil Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front, who were effectively elected when nominations closed last month with no opposition.

In Saturday's election for the 35 eastern seats, EPRLF won 17, and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress won 17, leaving the ruling party with one, officials said. Counting was continuing slowly because of a shortage of staff.

Following the polling Saturday, the commander of Indian peace-keeping forces, Lt. Gen. A.S. Kalkat, said there had been "moderate to heavy polling," while other sources said less than 3 per cent of Sinhalese voted.

Northern Sri Lanka is mainly populated by Tamils, while the east has ethnic Tamils, Sinhalese and Moslems in equal numbers.

Tamil rebels killed at least 16 Indian soldiers in attacks Sunday on several security posts and police stations in the north and east.

On Saturday, Kalkat told journalists in Trincomalee that only one Indian soldier had been killed and three others injured in attacks.

In southern Sri Lanka insurgents of the Peoples Liberation Front intensified anti-government violence Sunday. Police said at least nine persons were killed in separate incidents.

The front and its affiliates have opposed the presidential election in December as well as the Indo-Lankan accord, which they want abrogated before elections are held.



—Reuter photo

Armed guard watches over party headquarters