

*by UPI*

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka - The Sri Lankan government Tuesday claimed its forces destroyed 24 Tamil Tiger bunkers in separate clashes in the northern region, killing 15 rebels. The announcement said the forces lost two of its soldiers in the fighting reported in the region's Nagarkovil, Muhamalai and Kilali districts. The report said 30 more rebels and nine more soldiers were wounded. The rebels' Web site, TamilNet, claimed Tiger forces beat back the army's advances in some of the districts, killed at least 12 soldiers and wounded 27 more. Separately, the Press Trust of India reported the government plans to draft 2,000 paramilitary personnel to defend the island nation's southern region, where rebel attacks have increased in recent weeks in retaliation for the relentless government campaign in the Tamil-controlled north. There has been a sharp increase in violence on the island in recent months. The issue has been further complicated since the Sri Lankan government last week decided to withdraw from the 2002 cease-fire agreement brokered by Norway. Even before that decision, both sides had been accused of disregarding the truce in the past two years. The Tamil rebels have, however, said they are ready to implement the agreement fully.

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