

Tamil rebels say 20 civilians dead in military strike. (1994, October 02). *Sunday observer*.

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COLOMBO, Oct. 1 (AFP) — Tamil separatist guerillas Saturday charged the military with killing 20 civilians in northern Sri Lanka in aerial and artillery strikes, which they said imperilled the country's peace process.

In a statement received here from the London office, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) condemned retaliatory attacks made "recently" by government forces on the civilian population that had left 20 dead in the Jaffna peninsula.

"This is surely against the spirit of the peace process", the brief LTTE statement said without elaborating. The military here said it was not aware of any recent attacks that had caused civilian casualties.

Government troops earlier this week launched a limited offensive against the rebels outside the main Palaly military complex in the LTTE-controlled Jaffna peninsula.

The military lost two of

their men and estimated that the LTTE suffered between 50 to 70 dead in a nine-hour operation, which came six days after an LTTE suicide squad rammed a navy gunboat off the island's northwest coast.

The LTTE attack on the Navy ship left more than 20 sailors killed or missing and coincided with moves by the govern-

ment to open up a dialogue with the rebels aimed at resolving the dragging ethnic conflict in the northeast.

The LTTE is fighting for a separate state in the northeast for Sri Lanka's two million minority Tamils who are concentrated in the region. Thousands have died in the LTTE-led independence campaign.