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Sri Lankans Kill 36 Rebels as Monitors Begin Pullout

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS

COLOMBO, [Sri Lanka](#), (Agence France-Presse) — Heavy fighting raged Sunday in northern Sri Lanka, where [Tamil Tiger](#) rebels said they lost one of their leaders, as Norwegian-led monitors began pulling out before the formal end of a tattered truce.

The Defense Ministry said at least 36 guerrillas had been killed and one soldier wounded in fighting since Saturday along the de facto border marking rebel-held territory.

Among those killed was a top Tamil Tiger intelligence official, the ministry said, confirming a report on the pro-rebel Web site Tamilnet that Col. Shanmuganathan Ravishankar, a high-level rebel leader, was killed along with three other Tigers when a Sri Lanka military unit infiltrated rebel territory.

Two other people believed to be rebels died early Sunday after setting off hand grenades, apparently killing themselves to avoid capture by troops in the northern Jaffna peninsula, the Defense Ministry said.

Sri Lankan officials have denied carrying out attacks inside rebel territory, but they said there had been heavy long-range exchanges of fire in the region since the truce was formally declared dead last week.

The fresh clashes came as the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said it was winding down its operations before the February 2002 truce brokered by Norway formally ends on Jan. 16. The government withdrew last week from the agreement, which automatically also ends the monitoring mission, and gave the mandatory two weeks' notice to pull out.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's top adviser on the peace efforts resigned Sunday. The adviser, Jayantha Dhanapala, a diplomat who was appointed to the position in December 2005, said in a statement released by his office that he was resigning for "personal reasons."

Close confidants of Mr. Dhanapala said he was embarrassed by the turn of events, with the government pressing for a military victory after scoring several battlefield successes against the rebels last year.

Though there have been many violations of the truce in recent months, the developments of the last week have caused growing international concern that the fighting could become even more intense.

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