

Colombo crippled by LTTE

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THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam delivered a crippling blow to the Government of Sri Lanka on Friday (20) in a lightning attack that set ablaze two oil installations at Kolonnawa and Orugodawatte, bringing the country to a virtual standstill.

The mayhem which followed left twenty dead from the security forces and thirty-two more injured in addition to millions of dollars worth of fuel which went up in smoke. Among the injured was the BBC Colombo correspondent, George Arney, who was one of the first newsmen at the site, who received neck and leg injuries by shrapnel.

The Government imposed immediate curfew in Colombo and the suburbs which was in force at the time this edition went to press.

The lax security system within Colombo left much to be desired, proving once more that military intelligence is falling short of pre-empting possible attacks in Colombo's strategic sites. This is particularly so when it is common knowledge the LTTE is concentrating on Colombo while the military is

the enemy and it seems the forces geared for, only secret attacks from the LTTE.

The LTTE's simultaneous attacks, planned meticulously for 1.30 a.m. on Friday (20) in the Orugodawatte and Kolonnawa oil installations, had fireballs rocketing into the air and huge fumes of black clouds darkening the city.

The strike was obviously aimed at causing maximum damage to the infrastructure of the country. The two points of attack were the storage point for crude oil and the distribution point of consumer fuel.

The fire, which raged uncontrolled, had all the firefighting units from the fire brigade, municipality, air force and harbour, but in vain; the fire still rages on. The Government was compelled to seek technical assistance from India to control the raging fire which has engulfed Colombo and the suburbs.

The attack was carried out by the LTTE dressed in combat gear, who had divided themselves into two groups. The attack was two pronged, with one group entering zone number

sited on a sixty acre plot, is divided into nine zones. A road runs across the installation. On the left side are zones one to five and on the right are zones six to nine. The attack was launched on zone one and two which have four tanks containing kerosene, diesel and aviation turbine fuel. Six tanks at Kolonnawa were up in flames at the time this edition went to press.

The attack on the Orugodawatte crude oil installation was carried out by using mortars, destroying two of the four tanks at the site.

Security personnel within the Kolonnawa installation noticed the movements of the group that had scaled the wall, and on approaching them the Tigers started firing with Rocket Propelled Grenades, taking the security guards unawares. Two tanks exploded within seconds.

Although reporters from MTV, BBC and Lake House were the first to arrive and Yes FM Radio went on the air giving out details, the SLBC was quick to water down the details. The ETV gave live coverage of the fire.

Military assistance came after about an hour when around 25 soldiers went on a shootout trying to flush out the



Smoke billowing from the Kolonnawa installation after the Tiger attack

Picture by Padmasiri Gamage

three, four and six have been completely destroyed while another four tanks are badly damaged.

In Orugodawatte the police evacuated 5000 people in the vicinity due to fear that two tanks half filled with LP gas would explode due to pressure from

for nearly an hour.

While the shootout was raging at the installation, two LTTEs went towards a police post which was situated close to the Kolonnawa installation, shouting "vanga, vanga" (come, come) among themselves. The rebels fired at the

killing one of them while the other made a getaway.

While fighting raged, police and STF personnel cordoned off the area with roadblocks several kilometres away from the raging scene. Suspecting that some LTTEs might still be hiding inside the giant Kolonnawa com-

with various consumer goods was apprehended by the Police and the STF between Kolonnawa and Dematagoda. When the security personnel searched the lorry thoroughly they discovered RPGs, mortars, suicide kit, hand grenades and other terrorist equipment in the lorry. Police suspect that the lorry was to be used to take the attackers to safety. Police are now questioning the Tamil driver.

This was the first instance where weapons of this nature were found in Colombo. These had the capability to destroy large buildings. A rumour that the LTTE had attacked the Sapugaskande Oil Refinery also caused panic among Colombo residents. Police found a card with 20 numbers on the dead rebel which they suspect may be codes for identifying others in the group who participated in the attack. This man is suspected to be the perpetrator of the attack according to police sources. They added that one could deduce 20 terrorists had taken part in the attack.

Amidst the confusion created by the Kolonnawa blaze, two Sirasa FM reporters had entered a Muslim household close by in an attempt to seek safety. Minutes later, two members of the LTTE entered this house and asked the residents if they were

moment was broadcasting the incident. The terrorists then said, "What you see is our doing," closed the door and left.

The Government responded to the attack by banning the issuing of petrol and diesel except for the health and essential services. By 12 noon on Friday, Police had prevented the entry of vehicles into the city. In order to arrest the attackers who are believed to have escaped, security personnel in Colombo and outstations had conducted operations.

On Friday morning residents caught two Tamil men suspected of being attackers and handed them over to the Wellampitiya police, for questioning.

A fight also ensued between Government forces and five LTTE attackers at an area close to the Dematagoda Police Station where a suspected LTTEer was killed.

Although there were rumours that the Sapugaskande Oil Refinery is damaged, there is no truth in such reports, security sources said. The security at this installation was increased threefold by the Police and the Army, DIG Bandara and Gampaha Divisions Seneviratne Bandara said. DIG Bandara appointed SP Kamaldeen to overlook security arrangements in the Sapugaskande area. Following