

# Tamil Tiger planes bomb power station and army camp

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COLOMBO (Reuters) - The Tamil Tigers' air wing set a power station ablaze in the Sri Lankan capital and hit an army base on Tuesday in separate air raids, the military said.

The bombing runs were the eighth and ninth raids by the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) ramshackle air force of single-engine propeller-driven planes, which have bedeviled the Sri Lankan military since first striking in March 2007.

Tuesday's first attack hit Thalladi military camp about 250 km (150 miles) north of Colombo in Mannar district, causing minor damage and injuring one soldier, military spokesman Brig. Udaya Nanayakkara said.

Soon after, radar picked up an unidentified aircraft heading south over the Indian Ocean toward Colombo. The city was plunged into darkness after power was switched off as a precaution, jets were scrambled and air defenses activated.

"At around 1130 (2 p.m. EDT), an LTTE light aircraft came into Colombo and dropped bombs at Kelanitissa power station. Anti-aircraft guns were activated. There is some fire in the area and firefighters have been sent there," Nanayakkara said.

Shortly after the lights went out, the sound of anti-aircraft guns thundered from Colombo's shoreline, and people stood in the streets to watch.

Nanayakkara said it was not clear whether the raids were carried out by one plane or two.

## LONG CONFLICT

The rebels are locked in heavy fighting with the military in northern Sri Lanka, where the government is confident it will defeat a foe it has battled since 1983 in one of Asia's longest-running insurgencies.

The military has stepped up its offensive in the last three months and says it is within striking distance of the rebel capital Kilinochchi. It says it has steadily seized one LTTE stronghold after another as it marches north.

Since journalists are barred from the war zone, it is nearly impossible to get an independent account of where the fighting is occurring and of casualties.

The military says the Tigers' air wing, which debuted in March 2007 with a bombing run on the military air base inside Colombo's international airport, used to consist of three Czech-made Zlin-143 aircraft.

Its last raid came in September, when the military said it shot down one of the planes after it attacked a military base in Vavuniya, near the front lines. The Tigers denied that, and no evidence has ever been made public.

The other air raids have not caused major damage, but have embarrassed the air force by exposing its inability to stop them despite vastly superior jets and radar.

The Tigers are fighting to create a separate homeland for Sri Lankan Tamils, many of whom complain of marginalization by successive governments led by the Sinhalese majority since independence from Britain in 1948.

In doing so, they have landed on U.S., European and Indian terrorism lists for their use of suicide

bombings and assassinations of politicians including more moderate Sri Lankan Tamils and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

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