

Sri Lankan rebel planes bomb Colombo



Investigators survey the damage caused to the main Kelanitissa power station in Colombo by Tamil Tiger rebels who used a twin-seater light aircraft to mount a bombing raid. Photograph: EPA

The civil war in [Sri Lanka](#) took a deadly turn today as rebel planes dropped bombs on the country's southern capital and the army pushed ahead with its jungle offensive in the north of the island.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has been fighting for a separate state in Sri Lanka for 25 years, used light aircraft to attack a military camp in northern Mannar district of Colombo and a civilian power station just outside the city late yesterday. The bombing raids left one person dead.

The military confirmed that three bombs had been dropped by "LTTE aircraft over a military camp" while "two bombs" hit the state-run power station, damaging some turbines. The authorities blacked out the capital during the raid and the night sky lit up with anti-aircraft fire. The attack marked the first time rebel planes had bombed the capital in more than a year.

In an apparent response, the Sri Lankan army launched an assault deep into rebel territory, a ground battle that lasted for hours. Eventually the army said it had taken control of the town of Jayapura - part of its strategy to whittle away the rebels' de facto state in the north of the island.

The government of Sri Lanka does not allow independent verification of the battles, only taking in journalists "embedded" with the army. This has led to accusations that officials are underreporting its own casualties and exaggerating its gains. Last week the defence ministry said that it decided "suspend the reporting of all casualty figures in relation to the ongoing counter terrorist operation".

The LTTE's political head, B Nadesan, broke cover yesterday for the first time in weeks, giving interviews to Indian television and saying that there was little but boasting to the Sri Lankan army's claim that it would destroy the rebels.

"For the last 30 years it has been the practice of the Sri Lankan military to issue such reports," Mr Nadesan said. The rebel spokesman said that in 1995, the Sri Lankan army claimed 90% of the rebels strength had been destroyed.

"But within months waging a conventional war with the Sri Lankan military, our strength was demonstrated when we recaptured Jaffna. The Sri Lankan military claims that they have largely destroyed our strength and will soon capture [the rebel stronghold of] Kilinochchi. But when the time is right our military strength will be proved once again and the land we have lost will be retrieved."