

# 100 killed, 150 injured as bomb explodes in Sri Lankan bus terminal. (22, April 1987) *The Ottawa Citizen*

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## 100 killed, 150 injured as bomb explodes in Sri Lankan bus terminal

AP, Reuter and UPI

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — A powerful bomb ripped through Colombo's central bus terminal at the height of the evening rush hour Tuesday, killing at least 100 people and injuring more than 150.

Many of the victims were in six parked buses that were engulfed in flames, police and witnesses said.

No group or individual immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing, but authorities said they suspected Tamil rebels, who have been waging a war for independence on the island off the south-eastern coast of India.

Witnesses said several passing motorists were burned to death after they were trapped inside their cars by an intense blaze touched off by the explosion, and flames made human torches out of some commuters waiting for buses home.

Other victims were dismembered or blown apart by the force of the blast, which sparked a stampede by hundreds of panicked people trying to flee the burning bus station, witnesses said.

"We saw an orange-colored ball of fire rise into the sky," said R.L. Basanayake, 27. "I was watching two little girls jostling each other to get into a bus to Ne-

gombo. A few minutes later, there was the blast. Bodies were thrown in all directions. The bus caught fire and I heard screams."

The bus station was packed with hundreds of workers heading home from jobs in downtown Colombo and thousands of people were on the streets when the bomb, packed with more than 45 kilograms of explosives, went off, officials said.

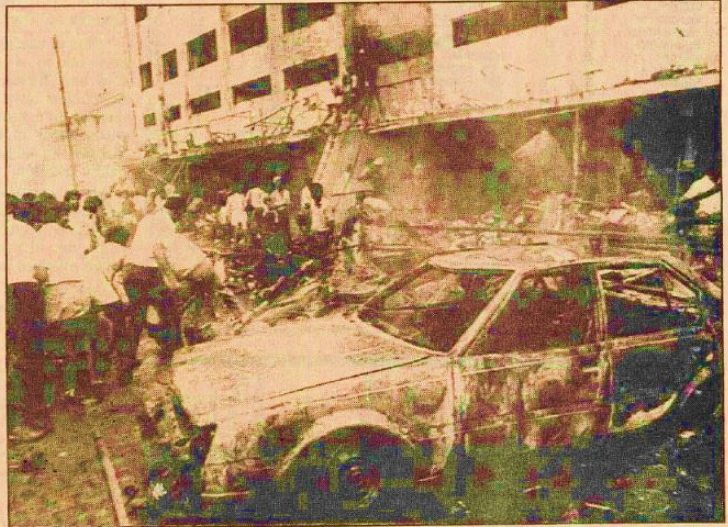
Authorities said the bomb, triggered by a timer or a remote-control device, was apparently planted in a van parked outside a Bank of Ceylon branch office at the terminal.

The Press Trust of India news agency reported a security guard tried to prevent two men from parking the vehicle outside the bank, but relented when the men promised to return shortly to move their van.

The bombing was the third terrorist attack since Friday in Sri Lanka.

Tamil rebels, who have waged a four-year war for an independent country on the island, killed at least 142 people in northeastern Sri Lanka on Friday and Monday.

At the scene, blood and debris littered (Bomb, page A2)



—Reuter photo

Rescue workers pull bodies from under debris at bus station

### Bomb

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the street. Smoke swirled through the heavy rain.

Blood-spattered victims, some missing limbs, were shoved into passing vehicles and taken to hospital. Ambulances continued to bring in victims more than an hour after the blast.

Army helicopters with searchlights clattered overhead after dark, helping with the rescue and the search for the attackers.

The government issued a statement blaming two Tamil separatist groups, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students.

Eelam is what the Tamils would call the country they want to establish in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, where members of their ethnic group predominate. Tamils, most of whom are Hindu, say they are discriminated against by the Buddhist Sinhalese, who comprise the majority in Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon.

Soon after the explosion, mobs of Sinhalese civilians stoned Tamil-owned shops less than a kilometre from the bus terminal. Police dispersed the crowds.

There were reports of Sinhalese youths stopping cars and demanding to know whether the occupants were Tamil or Sinhalese.

Authorities imposed a curfew, which they said would be lifted for four hours this morning. Government offices, banks, and private companies were ordered closed today.

The latest surge of violence began Friday, when Tamil guerrillas killed 127 civilians, most of whom were Sinhalese, after dragging them from buses and other vehicles on a jungle road 16 kilometres from the northeastern village of Vannela.

On Sunday night, Tamil guerrillas burst into four houses in Vannela, a Sinhalese settlement, tied up 15 villagers and shot them to death.

Tuesday's explosion was the first bombing in Colombo for nearly a year.

Tamils make up 18 per cent of Sri Lanka's 16 million people.

President Junius Jayewardene's government has proposed provincial councils to give greater autonomy to the north and east but refuses to consider an independent Tamil country.

When Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon and under British rule, Tamils were a privileged, well-educated, prosperous elite. Now they claim to be victims of discrimination in jobs, government positions and other fields.

Both Tamils and Sinhalese migrated from India, the Sinhalese from the north in the 3rd century BC