

25 die as Sri Lankan rebels bomb oil depots. (1995, October 20) *The Toronto star.*

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COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (Reuter) — Sri Lanka's security forces feared more suicide attacks by Tamil Tiger guerrillas yesterday after a violence-racked day in which two oil depots were bombed and 25 people were killed.

The suicide attacks were believed to be part of a bid to stop an army push in the rebel-held north of the island, off the southern coast of India, where guerrillas have been waging a separatist war against the ma-

jority Sinhalese since 1983.

"We've cordoned off certain areas of the city and have launched house-to-house searches for the terrorists who remain at large," a senior military officer said. "There might be more hit squads hiding in the city."

At least 25 people, including five attackers, died and about 32 were wounded when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels, including Black Tiger suicide bombers, blew up

two of Sri Lanka's three oil depots and shot at security forces yesterday, officials said.

The raid by about 20 rebels dressed in army fatigues came as President Chandrika Kumaratunga, herself on the guerrillas' hit list, left for New York to address the United Nations.

Massive explosions rocked Colombo, sending huge columns of flame leaping skywards after the rebels attacked the Kolonnawa and Orugodawatta oil depots, said witnesses awak-

ened by the blasts.

About 40,000 tonnes of diesel fuel and 15,000 tonnes of gasoline went up in flames.

A huge pall of smoke from the blazing oil depots hung over the streets that have been deserted since the government extended a curfew until dawn today to prevent a backlash against minority Tamils and looting of homes abandoned by residents fleeing the fire.

Firefighters battled to keep the blaze from spreading as the

army began evacuating residents near the oil depots. They feared liquid petroleum gas tanks, which escaped the initial blast, could explode because of the intense heat.

A government official said troops fired into the air to prevent Sinhalese mobs from attacking Tamils.

But police said any possible backlash against Tamils had been nipped in the bud.

A team of Indian firefighting experts was expected in Colom-

bo soon along with special firefighting equipment to douse the blazes, officials said.

BBC correspondent George Arney suffered shrapnel wounds to the neck and face when a bullet hit the wall next to him.

Police reported rebels were involved in gunfights with troops at two places near the oil depots. Troops were also combating a jungle area near one depot from which a police patrol came under fire.