

100 killed when reservoir bursts (1986, April 21) The Citizen, Ottawa.

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COLOMBO (AP) — Police said they believe some 100 people were killed Sunday when a reservoir holding nearly 1.5 billion cubic metres of water burst from its earthen embankment in northeastern Sri Lanka.

The state radio said up to 20,000 families were left homeless.

There were no reports of Canadians in the area.

The state-owned Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corp. said the flood was "a natural disaster and not the work of Tamil separatist guerrillas." The reservoir was in the northeastern area where rebels of the Tamil minority have been fighting for a separate state.

The embankment burst at 4 a.m., sending water rushing through nearby Kantalai town, 210 kilometres northeast of the Sri Lanka capital, Colombo. A re-

porter for The News in Colombo, K. D. D. Jayasekera, said that hours later water still poured through the prosperous, predominantly Moslem farming community.

The state radio estimated that 18,000 to 20,000 families were left homeless but gave no death toll. Jayasekera said police told him they feared 100 people were dead, but that no bodies had been recovered.

"Most of the bodies will be washed into the sea; a few naval boats and a helicopter are here but they can't reach the large number of people who are marooned," he said.

"The water level in the town varied. In some places it was just a couple of feet but in the lower lying areas it was much deeper."

Government officials in Trin-

comalee, the district capital 30 kilometres northeast of Kantalai, said refugee centres were set up at two schools. The Sri Lankan navy joined in rescue efforts.

"Some people are on treetops," said the state radio.

The reservoir, one of the largest in this South Asian island nation, was full to capacity for rice and sugar cane crops, said the government officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

They said the earthen embankment around the reservoir gave way at one of the reservoir's four sluices, where a crack was noticed several weeks ago but left unattended.

A Sinhalese-language newspaper reported in January that cracks had appeared in parts of the embankment. The reservoir was hundreds of years old.