


## Sri Lanka blast kills minister, 21 others. (2000, June 07). Reuters.

### UPDATE 2-Sri Lanka blast kills minister, 21 others

REUTERS 

06/07/00

COLOMBO, June 7 (Reuters) - At least one senior government minister and 21 others were killed in a suicide bomb blast on Wednesday in a suburb of the Sri Lankan capital Colombo, police said.

Industrial Development Minister C.V. Gunaratne died as he mingled with crowds in the southern Ratmalana suburb during a fund-raising procession to mark War Heroes Day honouring soldiers killed in the long-running war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), police said.

At least 60 people were injured, 15 of them seriously, when the suicide bomber blew himself up during the ruling People's Alliance procession, Dr W.G. Gunawardena, director of the Kalubowila-Dehiwala Teaching Hospital, told Reuters by phone. "I heard a huge explosion and then saw parts of bodies flying around. I can't remember what happened immediately after that," K.G. Karunadasa, a People's Alliance activist said at the blast site.

He said several of the injured, mostly bystanders, had been taken to hospital.

"The minister was walking from the Mount Lavinia junction to the next stop of the procession when the bomb went off," Newton Gunaratna, chairman of the state-owned ITN television and Lakhanda radio station said.

The broadcaster was one of the organisers of the procession.

The minister's wife, who was also in the procession, was critically injured in the blast and was being operated on in hospital, the state-owned Lakhanda radio said.

Body parts and shattered glass covered the blast site, one kilometre (mile) from the Ratmalana airport which is used by the air force.

Police quickly cordoned off the area.

Many vehicles were also damaged in the blast.

The procession, which started from the southern suburb of Mount Lavinia, was on its way to the southern town of Panadura, 25 km (15 miles) south of Colombo.

Gonadeniya Sumanaratna, a priest at a nearby Buddhist temple, said he saw some people jump from a truck just before the explosion.

The truck was parked close to the blast site.

Police said initial reports that the mayor of suburban Mount Lavinia-Dehiwala had been killed were not correct and that he was safe.

The LTTE have been fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east since 1983 and deadly bomb blasts in the capital have occurred frequently.

The Tiger rebels launched a push to recapture their former stronghold of northern Jaffna peninsula in March, but there has been a lull in fighting for the past two weeks.

The blast came after President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who escaped an assassination attempt by an LTTE suicide bomber last December, thanked families of soldiers killed in the war.

In a message to the war-weary nation she said there was no military solution to the conflict.

The country marked the day with a two-minute silence but soon after, the LTTE fired mortar bombs at the Muttur police station in eastern Trincomalee district, military officials said.

There were no casualties as most of the security personnel taking part in the ceremonies had dispersed.