Colombo Fort Bombing

Incident : Suicide Bombing
Location : Colombo, Sri Lanka
Date : 16th May 2008
Casualties: 11 Security Forces, 2 Civilians
Injuries : 86 People

Details Of Incident

A powerful bomb ripped through a high security area in Colombo, at exactly 1223hrs local time, on the 16th of May 2008, just before the new Chief Minister for the Eastern Province was scheduled to be sworn in at 1600hrs. A suicide bomber, rammed his motorbike that was skillfully packed with explosives into a police riot bus full of officers that was maneuvering into a parking lot. The site of the blast was the entrance of Lotus Road which is home to high end hotels, the old Parliament House and very close to President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s residence. 13 persons, 11 policemen and 2 civilians were killed and 6 Sri Lanka Army soldiers, 30 policemen and 59 civilians were injured.

The scene of the blast was a security check point where pedestrians and motorists were required to stop, produce identification and go through the necessary security checks.
The point of impact as seen above was the police riot squad bus. The suicide bomber had breached the security checkpoint located approximately 20 meters away from the blast scene and rammed the vehicle into the bus that was being parked. The officers were getting ready to disembark and assume their positions.

A motorized three-wheeler which was carrying passengers was caught in the blast. Its driver and one passenger were killed instantly.
Police Bomb Squad technicians inspect the remains of a three-wheeler, fearing that a secondary bomb may go off. Many security forces’ vehicles were damaged, and a few civilian vehicles were caught in the blast, including a family that was attending a wedding at the nearby Hilton Colombo Hotel.

**Significance of the Incident**

No claims have been made as to who was responsible for the bombings, but there was significant evidence which bears the hallmark of an LTTE attack. The attack happened near the Sambuddhaloka Viharaya Buddhist Temple, during the upcoming Vesak Day celebrations. The attack also came after the Sri Lankan Air Force raided an LTTE camp and killed 17 fighters.

However according to the many security forces personnel who were interviewed, the most probable reason was to portray resentment on the part of the LTTE pertaining to the new appointment of the Chief Minister for the Eastern Provinces, Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan alias Pillayan. The bike used in the bombings was traced to a man in Trincomalee, who is a TVMP member. However there is no significant evidence to claim that the TVMP Party is involved in the bombing.

The incident took place in a high security zone which is of utmost importance to the security forces. They will have to review their current measures in place and ensure that future attacks are deterred.

**On Scene Observations**

Many observations were made at the scene of the blast.
1. Security Forces were clearly taken off guard and many soldiers were visibly shaken.
2. Buffer zone was set up almost immediately after the blast.
3. At 1235hrs: ambulances arrive at the scene
4. At 1238hrs: Sri Lankan Defence Secretary arrives to inspect the scene
5. At 1252hrs: News Crews arrive on site to cover the incident
6. By 1330hrs all casualties had been evacuated from the scene.

The road was closed till 2200hrs that evening. All traffic was diverted elsewhere. The scene was initially chaotic and rowdy. The situation was very quickly brought under control and handled very professionally by the Sri Lankan security forces. The speed and efficiency at which they operated was truly commendable. An interview with the commander in charge revealed that the bomber was stopped and checked a few hundred meters away at another checkpoint. However it is believed that he is of Sinhalese ethnicity and thus did not arouse much suspicion. This poses a major problem, claims the commander who chose not to be named.

The author of this report was in Sri Lanka and was present at the scene of the blast and had witnesses the events that unfolded after that. The author was also allowed a quick walk through of the blast scene, post official investigations.

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