Moratuwa Bus Bombing

Incident : Road side bombing
Location : Moratuwa, Sri Lanka
Date : 6 June 2008
Death toll: 20 civilians
Injuries : 60

Details of Incident
On 6 June 2008, a bomb exploded on a crowded passenger bus in Katubadda, Moratuwa.1 Situated along the southwestern coast, Moratuwa is a city located about 11 miles from the capital of Colombo. According to police sources the attack took place between 7.30 and 7.45 am.2 Initial reports issued by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence stated that 21 people were killed while another 50 were injured.3 As of this writing, the death toll remains at 20 while the number of casualties has risen to 60. Of the dead, 12 are males and 8 are females.4 Following the incident, police imposed curfew in the Moratuwa area. In a subsequent search operation conducted in the area by the Special Task Force (STF), a 5kg claymore mine and a Micro pistol were recovered.5 The explosion also caused a crater on the side of the road.

Footboard

Crater caused on the side of the road by the blast
Injured passengers being removed from the bus

Injured passengers being removed from the bus
Target
The target of the attack was a passenger bus bearing number 29-1885. It was traveling from Kottawa to Mount Lavinia (route number 255), when attack took place. This is the latest in a series of bomb attacks carried out by the LTTE targeting transportation infrastructure. On 4 June 2008, a train was targeted at Dehiwela killing eight civilians. Also prior to this latest attack, in May 2008 police had foiled a similar bomb plot in the Moratuwa area. On 24 May 2008 for example, a civilian discovered a bomb weighing 3kg placed inside a public bus that had been travelling from Colombo to Moratuwa during the evening.

Tactic
According the Sri Lankan military the bomb was placed between the Shailabimbaramaya Buddhist temple and the University of Moratuwa. It is believed that the bomb was triggered by a remote controlled detonator. The timing of the attack (morning rush hour) is likely to have been chosen deliberately to inflict maximum damage. Information pertaining to the weight of the bomb, type of explosives or type of detonator etc. has not yet been released.

Group Responsible
The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence has accused the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of carrying out this attack. Although the group has not responded to the allegation, it possesses the motive, capability and the opportunity to carry out such an attack. As mentioned earlier, this is the latest in a series of bombs that have been carried out against civilians outside the conflict zone. A direct nexus between the bombings and the LTTE was drawn following the train bombing on 4 June 2008. In the police investigation that ensued, authorities arrested Jatheesan Balasubramaniyam in connection with the bombing. It was later revealed during questioning that Balasubramaniyam was an LTTE cadre and that he was responsible for carrying out the attack against the train.

Assessment
This is the second attack targeting civilians in two days. The LTTE’s primarily motivation for carrying out terrorist attacks is to exert pressure on the government to enter into a Ceasefire Agreement thus allowing the group enough time and space to recuperate and build up its military arsenal. Although several bomb plots have been neutralized by the authorities, the nature of the soft targets makes it difficult to secure. Despite the relatively small number of deaths and destruction, the psychological impact arising from the fear of attacks in the public domain and the inability of the authorities to prevent these attacks is still likely to be quite effective.

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