

Army a step ahead of Tamil attacks (Sri Lanka)

SECURITY forces in Sri Lanka have foiled a spate of terrorist attacks planned by Tamil Tiger insurgents, the army's military spokesman says.

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Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara told The Age yesterday the heightened threat of terrorism justified a huge security presence in the capital, Colombo.

"We have prevented a large number of these types of incidents by having a large number of security forces present in the area," he said.

Those travelling by vehicle around the city are stopped constantly by heavily armed troops at special checkpoints for searches and identification checks.

The Tamil Tigers are under extreme pressure after a string of military losses in the north of Sri Lanka and there are fears the rebels could respond by stepping up efforts to launch terrorist strikes in the south of the country, especially Colombo.

The threat of attack was underscored when two people, including a policeman, were killed when a bomb went off yesterday morning in the town of Batticaloa.

Brigadier Nanayakkara said a landmine attached to a bicycle exploded near a police station. At least 11 people were injured, including four schoolchildren, he said.

Authorities blamed Tamil Tigers for the incident, although there has been no reaction from the rebels.

Security forces say they have found evidence pointing to further attacks being planned for Colombo.

Brigadier Nanayakkara said that last week security forces found a suicide bomb jacket hidden on the road to Colombo airport. "They had kept it under a bush on a vacant plot of land," he said.

The Tamil Tigers have waged a 25-year campaign for a separate homeland and until recently controlled a large part of northern Sri Lanka.

But Government troops have pushed the rebels back to an area of jungle in the far north-east.

It is estimated that at least 70,000 people have been killed during the conflict.

There were two suicide attacks in Colombo early this month, immediately after the army captured the town of Kilinochchi, the Tigers' former political headquarters.

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