

# The Guardian

## Tamil Tigers attack Colombo with aircraft



Search lights sweep the sky over Colombo during an air raid by the Tamil Tigers Photograph: Ishara S Kodikara/AFP/Getty Images

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Two Tamil Tiger aircraft launched an attack on Colombo last night sending a message of defiance to the Sri Lankan government which believes it is close to defeating the rebels, who are holed-up in the north-east of the country.

At least two people were confirmed dead last night and a further 50 injured after the Sri Lankan military shot down the light aircraft, one of which crashed into a tax office building.

Rebel fighters are boxed into a 34-square mile pocket of dense forest, convincing the Sri Lankan government that an end is in sight to the decades-long civil war. Witnesses said the air attack started at around 9.30pm as two jets appeared over the city's port area.

The light aircraft were met with a barrage of tracer bullets, anti-aircraft fire and flares fired from army defence positions within the city, preventing the pilots from dropping bombs.

An air force spokesman, wing commander Janaka Nanayakkara, said one of the felled jets nose-dived into the tax office, shattering the front of the building. The second aircraft was brought down near the town of Katunayake, 20 miles north of Colombo.

As the emergency was downgraded late last night, questions emerged over the army response amid claims dozens of bystanders were hit in a crossfire between anti-aircraft guns.

The attack, the tenth of its kind in two years, heaps embarrassment on the Sri Lankan government which claimed it had destroyed the rebels' runways a fortnight ago as part of its punishing military campaign to end the 25-year conflict.

The Red Cross yesterday pledged to ferry more wounded and sick civilians out of the conflict zone, amid fears of a mounting humanitarian disaster.

An estimated 250,000 people are trapped between government forces and rebel fighters without access to food, medicine and shelter.

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