

Headline: Violence plagues Sri Lanka  
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## **Recent terrorist attacks are a reminder of the high costs of Sri Lanka's civil war with no end in sight. By Ben Davies.**

IN the western harbour district of Colombo, a pair of rusted cannon point out incongruously over the Indian Ocean. The cannon were used more than a century ago by the British to protect their colony from attack from the sea.

These days, the Sri Lankan government, led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, might be forgiven for wanting to turn these same guns inland in a bid to contain the wave of violence sweeping the island.

On Sunday, Sept 26, a bomb ripped through a crowded bus bound for Monaragala, killing one person and injuring a further 33 civilians. A day later, four government soldiers were killed in the north-east of the country after an ambush by Tamil Tiger guerillas.

The terrorist attacks, although relatively minor by the standards of Sri Lanka's recent turbulent history, are just the latest in a succession of violent incidents that continue to wreck this island nation. Three years ago, more than 80 people died and 1,000 were hurt when a bomb went off in the Central Bank building in the heart of the city.

Passengers who arrive at Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport at night must now run the gauntlet of five or six military checkpoints on their 40-km journey into the city centre. During the day, armed soldiers patrol the breezy promenade along the seafront to keep the Tamil Tigers (officially the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) from entering the city's business and tourist district.

"Because so many troops are stationed around the capital, we do not worry about our own safety," says S Nagarajah, executive vice-president at DFCC, a financial institution whose headquarters is in the picturesque colonial district along Galle Road.

Elsewhere in this country of 18 million people, it is impossible to ignore the human and financial costs of a civil war which over the past 16 years has left more than 50,000 dead and many more wounded or displaced.

Despite efforts to win over the Tamil separatists in the north and east of the country, violent incidents and massacres once again appear to be on the increase. Last year, the government spent 56 billion rupees (\$\$1.35 billion) on defence, representing almost a third of the state's revenues. This year, the figure could be even higher despite a slowing economy and a decline in revenues from tea, the primary export commodity. "We are tired of this fighting, but nobody knows when it will end," says Saburu Udeshi, a school teacher from a Colombo suburb.

In the far north, the situation remains extremely tense. The city of Jaffna, long fought over by Tamil guerillas, Sri Lankan government troops and Indian Peace Keeping Forces, can only be reached by sea or air, despite the fact that it is now in government hands.

The once popular resorts of Nilaveli and Uppuveli on the eastern coast are all but off limits to the 400,000 or so tourists who are expected to visit Sri Lanka in 1999. "For security reasons, we advise tourists in search of beaches to go to the south," says a spokeswoman from the Sri Lankan Consulate in Bangkok.

Even in Colombo's five star Taj Samudra Hotel, the 6th floor executive wing offers panoramic views not only of cargo boats moored far out in the Indian Ocean, but of uniformed soldiers guarding the lush hotel grounds below.