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LTTE commandos smash Anuradhapura airbase

Key spy plane amongst Sri Lankan losses of \$40m

THE Sri Lanka Air Force lost over \$40m dollars worth of aircraft and equipment in the Tamil Tiger ground and air attack Monday, international press reports said quoting Sri Lankan officials.

Amongst the losses was a specialized surveillance aircraft ordered by the then UNP government just before it began peace talks with the LTTE, the reports said.

Twenty one soldiers from the LTTE's elite 'Black Tiger' regiment stormed the SLAF airbase in Anuradhapura in the early hours of Monday. The fighting continued for several hours after the attackers took control of key sections of the base.

The Tigers were supported by at least two aircraft of the Tamillelam Air Force (TAF) which bombed the airbase shortly after the attack began at 3a.m.

Citing the official government statements of two Mi-24 helicopter gunships damaged and one Bell 212 gunship crash landing, the British newspaper, 'The Telegraph' also quoted 'well-placed sources in Colombo' as saying the damage was on a far greater scale than had been admitted.

The LTTE attack had destroyed military planes and equipment worth more than £20 (\$40m) million, the paper reported.

"Among the planes allegedly damaged or destroyed was a Beechcraft surveillance plane worth £14 million, two Mi17 helicopters, two Mi24 helicopters, three unmanned aerial vehicles, a K-8 jet and eight PD6 propeller trainer aircraft," the paper reported.

Earlier, press reports also quoted Sri Lanka's best known defen-



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Among the Sri Lankan aircraft destroyed were a Beechcraft spy plan (top) and two Mi-24 helicopter gunships (above). Photos SLAF

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