

E1-21 Tornado wind burst at Halpe on June 13, 1996

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It is normal to have strong gusty winds in the south-western part and in the hilly slopes of Sri Lanka during the south-west monsoon period. However an abnormal wind condition and rain occurred around 4 - 5 a.m. on June 13, 1996 at Halpe, Balangoda in the Ratnapura district.

The available weather observations at the Meteorology Department show that there was a depression located about 80 km north-east of Batticaloa in the Bay of Bengal. Synoptic observations indicated a steady rise of pressure gradient across the island during early hours of June 13, 1996.

Radar winds at Colombo had increased by two fold from June 12-13, 1996 which indicated a very unstable weather condition over the island.

Tornadoes are the most violent weather systems and they are small in size and short lived storms. A weak tornado will last for 1 - 3 min while life expectancy of an intense tornado could be several hours and wind may reach 500 km h^{-1} . In general, weather observations of tornadoes are not available and estimates are made by examining debris from the site where a tornado has occurred.

The site at Halpe was visited, wind damaged areas were examined and photographs were taken. People in the area were consulted. Collected data was compared with available information from studies in other countries. With the debris on the ground and other information it is tempting to conclude that this was a weak tornado which will fall in to F1 of Fujita's tornado scale. The wind speed for this scale is around $100 - 150 \text{ km h}^{-1}$.