



# when the SUICIDE

On the day before she set out to blow up the Sri Lankan prime minister, she wore the vest full of explosives that would turn her into a

**T**HE DENIM VEST is a simple garment, tailored to fit the young woman's body. Narrow shoulder straps hold the mid-section in place. It's not high fashion, but that doesn't matter, since the first time it's worn will also be the last. The large disk that rests under the breast area is filled with a mass of 3-mm steel balls, and behind that, next to the skin, sits a C-4 plastic explosive. Two detonators, one on either side of her body, require just a gentle tug. Then, in an instant, the vest wearer becomes a human bomb, capable of killing or maiming dozens

of people within a 100-foot radius. Menake's vest fit her well. She tried it on several times to make sure it lay snugly against her chest. She practiced reaching for the detonators without arousing suspicion. She thought hard about the best outfit to disguise its deadly purpose, settling on a sequined top whose shimmer would distract the eye from what lay beneath.

The 27-year-old woman is not what we picture when we hear "suicide bomber." With her long black hair neatly pulled back from her chocolate-colored

skin, she is shy, soft-spoken—the kind of person you'd trust with your kids. But Menake is also a member of the Black Tigers, the suicide commando squad of Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist group that has more female suicide bombers than any other organization in the world.

For three days last September, Menake staked out the tree-lined streets of Colombo's richest neighborhood, home to Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremnayake. Watching from the shadows, observing the prime minister's