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From stalemate to standoff

THE 13-WEEK SIEGE of Jaffna Fort by Tamil guerrillas was broken on 26 September when a relief column of Sri Lankan forces evacuated the 55 acre fortress after a two-week struggle to secure the surrounding area.

In an amphibious assault from Mandaitivu island, 2,000 soldiers fought their way to the gates of the 17th century stronghold on 13 September only to be pinned down in its environs by heavy fire from the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). More than 30 soldiers died in the assault and 130 were injured. A Sri Lankan Sea King bomber crashed into Jaffna lagoon, struck say the LTTE by a SAM 7 missile. The government claimed 150 Tiger casualties and Army Commander Lt. Gen. Hamilton Wanasinghe said a further 3,000 troops would shortly move into Jaffna to regain control of the peninsula.

After initial attempts to advance to Jaffna telecommunications centre, Sri Lankan forces were hemmed in by a lethal noose of landmines and heavy mortar fire from surrounding Tiger bunkers.

In the face of stiff resistance, the military turned a stalemate into what correspondents described as "a pyrrhic victory" by evacuating the Fort, calling for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to set up a demilitarised zone around the Fort and Jaffna General Hospital. Over 200 security personnel who survived the 13-week siege were flown to Colombo for immediate treatment.

The LTTE say, however they captured the Fort in a 2 am offensive driving the Sri Lankan forces into their landing craft, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing substantial quantities of arms and ammunition. There are no independent ac-

Sri Lankan forces evacuate Jaffna Fort

counts of events but observers agree that the first phase of the battle for Jaffna is over.

Sri Lankan forces have also evacuated Mandaitivu due to insecure water supplies, but remain on the northern islands of Kayts and Karaitivu where there are reports of looting and civilian killings. Government forces still hold the port of Kankesanthurai and the airfield at Palaly on the peninsula.

The Tiger flag meanwhile flies over Jaffna Fort and the LTTE have destroyed all strategic buildings inside the perimeter. ICRC discussions with the Tigers on the future of the Fort are now underway and may be lengthy.

Heavy bombing by the Sri Lankan air force has continued and areas of central Jaffna including the Holy Family Convent are reduced to rubble. Helicopter gunships strafe moving targets and irregular food convoys keep Jaffna only days away from starvation.

Observers say the present military standoff has tactical advantages for the government in view of the annual World Bank meeting in Paris on 25 October where Sri Lanka will ask for \$850 million in foreign aid.

The ICRC buffer zone portrays Sri Lanka as taking responsible steps to promote mediation and to protect civilians at a crucial juncture in the conflict - a juncture that requires a massive cash infusion to finish the job.

With the North-East war now costing \$250,000 a day, most people including the Tigers, believe the Army will have run out of money by November. The Tiger's tactics suggest they will not come to the negotiating table before then.

The Army will now call their bluff, conserve their strength and sit it out until the international community gives Sri Lanka, however reluctantly the money and munitions they require.

But the LTTE's resources are also finite and there are signs of increasing desperation in Tiger propaganda and

other reports emerging from the peninsula.

LTTE communiques speak of the capture of Tamil "traitors" in Jaffna directing aerial bombing by short wave radio and families with connections with other Tamil groups such as EPRLF being taken into custody.

The atmosphere is increasingly volatile, designed to pressure thousands of young males in Jaffna into joining the military struggle. Posters signed by the LTTE leader Prabhakaran have appeared throughout the peninsula demanding people join the Tigers' new civilian militia. Families are told bluntly "You give a son or two gold sovereigns". They will take the money but it is the boys they really want.

Crack cadres from Mannar and the east have been pulled back to defend the peninsula - the movement's symbolic centre and the vital supply link with the LTTE's rear base in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The disposition of India, the region's self-appointed policeman remains a crucial factor in the manoeuvring of the next months. At a rally in Madras on 10 September, Prime Minister V P Singh made an impassioned plea for the safety of Jaffna civilians which was widely derided in the Colombo press.

Mr Singh also said Indian Foreign Minister I K Gujral would visit Colombo shortly and his brief will be to knock some heads together and bring both sides back to the negotiating table. Ceylon Workers Congress leader Minister S Thondaman continues to lobby Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, a Tiger confidante, to convince the LTTE to disarm and negotiate.

In a rare moment of seeming remorse, Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne told Sri Lanka's parliament on 21 September that while the bombing of Jaffna was not indiscriminate, there were instances when bombs dropped had been carried away by the wind. But it is the dust of Jaffna town, destroyed that the wind carries away.

Since 2 July, Sri Lanka's Central Bank has sold Rs 2 billion (\$50 million) worth of National Defence Bonds, paying 15% interest, to fund the war in the North. Economists say the Government needs to raise another Rs 3 billion for the current war effort to break even. The National Defence Fund stands at Rs 171 million. The Government will raise the balance by printing Rs 1 billion in new currency and offering a further Rs 2 billion in war bonds. The budget deficit for 1991 is projected at Rs 67 billion (\$1.7 billion).

Amnesty highlights "human rights" crisis in Sri Lanka

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL has launched a campaign to draw attention to the growing "human rights crisis" in Sri Lanka where, it claims, thousands of people "disappeared" in detention or were tortured or killed by security forces in the last three years.

The victims included, Amnesty says not only cadres of the southern insurgent JVP, smashed by the Army last year but also members of legitimate opposition parties and many innocent civilians. Their report also highlights similar human rights abuses by the Indian Peace Keeping Force in northern Sri Lanka and by the Tamil Tigers in their three months of hegemony before the June war.

Amnesty draws attention to Sri Lanka's draconian emergency laws and calls for an independent commission of inquiry to investigate disappearances and extrajudicial executions, whose findings should be made public. Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne described the human rights agency's report as unbalanced and again dismissed Amnesty as "a terrorist organisation". But there were already signs of a crackdown on human rights workers in Colombo.

On 6 September K Kugamoorthy, a Tamil radio producer and National Committee member of human rights agency MIRJE was abducted by armed men on Jawatte Road, Colombo. Later police called at his home and told relatives that Mr Kugamoorthy's motor cycle had been found and that he should collect it. Appeals by friends, relatives and the diplomatic community to President Premadasa and the Defence Minister have yielded little result. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) deny Mr Kugamoorthy is in their custody.

On 11 September police stopped

opposition MP Mahinda Rajapakse, a leading campaigner for human rights, at Colombo airport and removed a dossier of 533 disappearance cases, most containing the names of the complainant.

Mr Rajapakse was to testify at a closed session in Geneva of the UN Human Rights Commission's Working Group on Disappearances due to visit Sri Lanka later this year. He later gave oral evidence before the Commission who lodged an immediate protest with the Sri Lankan government and asked for the dossier.

Replying to a parliamentary question from NSSP MP Vasudeva Nanayakkara on 21 September, Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said police investigations were underway to test the authenticity of the disappearance documents. Relatives of the 533 victims have already been visited by the police.

In early September lawyer Batty Weerakoon asked President Premadasa for a Commission of Inquiry into the murder of journalist Richard de Zoysa after the Attorney General found insufficient evidence to proceed against senior police officer Ronnie Gunesinghe. In a reply to Mr Weerakoon, the President's secretary K H J Wijedasa said that police investigations would continue.

The mother of the murdered journalist, Mrs Manorani Saravanamuttu received the "Journalist of the Year" award on behalf of her son from third world news agency Inter Press Service at the United Nations in New York on 18 September. Both she and Mr Weerakoon have received death threats telling them to abandon the case and *Article 19*, the International Campaign against Censorship has petitioned UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar to join the call for an independent inquiry.

Third World

SLFP MP Wijithamuni de Soysa told Parliament on 6 September that 84,000 acres of fertile land in Moneragala District had been handed over to multinationals for sugarcane cultivation, while local farmers struggled to survive

Protest campaign

Thirty four Opposition MPs mounted a sit-in protest fast in Parliament on 7 September to draw attention to Sri Lanka's spiralling cost of living. Two weeks later 50 MPs who took over a State bus as part of the same campaign were attacked by a gang led by a Police Sub-Inspector.

Casualties

Defence Secretary Cyril Ranatunge said in mid-September that 599 security personnel had been killed and 106 were missing since 11 June. An LTTE survey says 1,879 civilians had died by late August. An independent estimate gives total casualties of 3,875 to mid-September. Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne says 2,500 Tigers have been killed or injured including 76 commanders.

Repatriation

Justice Minister A C S Hameed told a delegation that Air Lanka would run 22 flights a week costing \$13.5 million to repatriate 9,000 Sri Lankan refugees from Amman. There are a further 95,000 Sri Lankans trapped in Kuwait.

Cache

Police discovered a container load of LTTE military supplies from Singapore at Colombo port on 21 September. They are seeking a former Jaffna school teacher whom they say is also implicated in the murder of Tamil moderate leader A Amirthalingam.

The price of freedom

FEARS are growing for over 2,000 young Tamils arrested by police in the Colombo area in late June after the outbreak of war in the North-East.

Survivors of the roundups speak of hooded informers who arbitrarily identify young men as *kottiya* (Sinhala: Tigers) and of beatings and interrogations.

Many are taken to Mahara Prison, ten miles north of Colombo, where they are kept in dormitories of 150, sharing ten buckets of water to wash twice a week. Food is meagre and of poor quality. On 28 June, a group of new arrivals were hur-

riedly removed from Mahara after one of them died as a result of a four-day interrogation in a Colombo police station.

No one knows the real casualty rate but those held at police stations say that, after successful LTTE attacks in the north, Colombo police regularly mount revenge operations on Tamil civilians in the city.

Identification as a Tiger does not prevent a young Tamil being able to buy his release through a lawyer who pays Rs 30,000 (\$750) to the police station where he was arrested. Ten or more boys leave Mahara this way every week and are

immediately replaced by a fresh crop of "suspects". Those who pay are hurriedly produced before a magistrate and have their detention orders quashed which grants them a temporary immunity in the regular police raids on student hostels and cheap lodgings, but for many, the only real hope of safety is to leave the country.

To do that, their family must pay one of the many "travel agents" who specialise in the Tamil refugee trade, around Rs 200,000 (\$5,000) for a ticket and a forged visa to America or Europe. In Colombo, civil liberty is an expensive business.

Tigers drive refugees into the jungle

Killing spree continues in Batticaloa

A NEW CRISIS hit 42,000 Tamil refugees at Vantharumoolai, north of Batticaloa on Sri Lanka's east coast as Tiger cadres ordered them out of the camp and into the jungles as the struggle for control of the area intensified in late September.

After incidents at the camp, where Tigers infiltrated the refuge complex to steal food, the Army mounted a counter operation on 5 September when 158 LTTE 'suspects' were arrested after being pointed out by Muslim Home Guards. Five others, who died after taking LTTE cyanide capsules according to the Army, were shot, local sources say. The Army insists all those arrested were subsequently released, but none has returned to friends and family at Vantharumoolai and they are feared dead.

Four days later, 117 men, women and children, who were taken to Sathurukon-

dan Army camp from surrounding villages a few miles outside Batticaloa, were shot dead local sources say. One person escaped with injuries.

Tension remains high between Tamils and Muslims after the large scale killings last month. Seven Muslims were killed on 14 September when the LTTE attacked Punanai on the Batticaloa-Polonnaruwa road and a Tamil was shot dead by militant group *Jihad* in the Muslim stronghold of Kattankudy. The day before a Parliamentary delegation visited Batticaloa on 22 September, 19 Tamils were hacked to death at nearby Thalankudah.

A week earlier, Tamil and Muslim political parties met in Colombo to consider the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) demand for a separate Muslim province in the East, based around Ampara District. Absent from the meet-

ing was Tamil group TELO, who accused Muslim Home Guards of the Thalankudah killings. TELO cadres are increasingly active alongside Sri Lankan Army units and TELO's Batticaloa commander *Moldon*, was killed by the LTTE in the town's hospital in early September while receiving treatment after a car accident.

Batticaloa Army commander, Brigadier ANU Seneviratne has denied that Muslim Home Guards massacred over 50 Tamils at Puthukudiyiruppu eight miles south of the town in mid-September. Tamil group ENDLF sent a telegram to President Premadasa asking him to immediately disband Muslim paramilitary units and to investigate the growing violence in Batticaloa.

Army operations continue to meet with mixed results. Nine soldiers were killed and two seriously injured when the LTTE ambushed an Army truck on the Sinhapura-Kandakaduwa road in Polonnaruwa on 22 September and the border areas of Polonnaruwa are coming under increased LTTE pressure, observers say.

In Ampara four days earlier, soldiers ambushed a Tiger platoon laying mines on the road near Chavalakadai killing 17. They also captured a large LTTE base at Velayuthapuram but there are still major Tiger concentrations around Pottuvil.

Late reports from Batticaloa town say schools and temples were already congested with refugees in the wake of the Sathurukondan killings. The Tigers' Vantharumoolai ultimatum is designed to cause the maximum disruption, observers say, in a landscape already littered with disaster.

S.O.S. Trincomalee

GOVERNMENT officials made an urgent appeal in late September for doctors and medical personnel to serve in Trincomalee as conditions in the district continued to deteriorate.

Reports say there are 85,000 people displaced in the district, 20,000 in the isolated Eechilampathai area south of Koddigar Bay, without food or medicine. Assistant Government Agent Arulpragasam visited Batticaloa in mid September to release relief supplies stockpiled at Valaichenai.

There is little harvesting of this year's autumn rice crop in the face of an LTTE ban. Seasonal labour has stayed away, there is no fuel for tractors and the Army refuses security. Water and sanitation is a major problem in the refugee camps in Trincomalee town with Clappenberg, a dark airless aircraft hanger housing 4,000 Tamils, little better than a concentration camp. Over 300 Tamils arrested this month attempting to escape by sea to India are now held there and reports continue of Army night raids on refugee camps and indiscriminate arrests.

TULF MP Mavai Senathirajah says hundreds of Tamils arrested in Trincomalee have disappeared and that looting of Tamil houses continues, including that of former MP R Sampanthan. Lands belonging to five Hindu temples have been redistributed to Sinhalese colonists, says the MP.

Tamil MP Suresh Premachandran

reports that 55 refugees from Pachchanur camp mysteriously disappeared this month and that Tamil government employees fear arrest if they report for work. As in Batticaloa many people have decided they are safer in the jungle than in government refugee facilities.

Outside the town, the Tigers hold sway with stretches of the main road south under heavy pressure. In an LTTE attack on the Allai-Kantalai road on 1 September, five soldiers were killed and seven injured. But army operations continue, and four LTTE cadres were killed and substantial arms captured in a clash at Tennaimaravady in late September.

Tiger massacre in Wilpattu

MORE THAN 40 Sinhalese were killed and many others wounded when Tamil Tigers attacked the fishing village of Wellamundal, north of Puttalam on Sri Lanka's west coast. A heavily armed Tiger unit in black combat fatigues emerged from the Wilpattu jungles on 19 September and only six villagers escaped. The LTTE has not struck so far south for some time, defence sources say.

North of Wilpattu on Mannar Island, after the Tigers attacked Talaimannar naval base in early September, coastal areas of Pesalai, where there are heavy concentrations of refugees at St Mary's Church, were shelled by Sri Lankan gun-

boats. Casualty figures are not known.

The Sri Lankan navy also fired on over 100 Indian fishermen in craft in the Palk Strait in an incident in mid-September. Ten were killed and an unknown number were taken into custody.

After an hour-long chase 15 miles off Point Pedro, naval patrols captured an armoured LTTE speedboat on 22 September, killing seven of the eight occupants.

Rumours say the 15 year-old survivor, held under maximum security in a Colombo hospital has named LTTE political front leaders Anton Balasingham and *Yogi* as among the dead.

REFUGEES NEED FOOD AND SHELTER BEFORE THE MONSOON BREAKS

Schooled in suffering

VANTHARUMOLAI refugee camp at Eastern University, north of Batticaloa which houses over 40,000 people without adequate food or shelter, has become a school for suffering, refugee workers say.

Less than 200 metric tons of food aid arrived this month - 1,140 tons short of its needs - and the primitive ration system for the camp's seven sectors has broken down. Small stalls inside the camp sell vegetables and matches at inflated prices while rice rots in the fields outside.

Batticaloa District is Sri Lanka's rice bowl and small groups of foragers from the camp brave suspicious Army patrols to gather grain. The LTTE has banned harvesting and after the ethnic violence, Muslims refuse to work for Tamils. If this harvest does not come in, farmers will not waste precious capital to plough and sow for next year and the threat of a greater famine lies ahead.

Shelter is also a major problem at Vantharumoolai. Many families live in a flimsy enclosure made from a sari and a few pieces of twig. The rains due in a few weeks, will turn the area into a quagmire. Local relief trucks will not travel without an Army or NGO escort and there is need

Indian High Commissioner N Jha said in early September that India will fund three refugee camps in northern Sri Lanka. Two will be in Mannar District at Pesalai and Madhu where international refugee agency UNHCR will run 'open relief centres'. Over 115,000 people have fled to South India since 11 June and Indian and Sri Lankan defence officials plan a new "Surveillance Zone" in the Palk Strait to stem the flow of refugees to south India and to shut down LTTE's supply lines.

for a massive relief effort by air, rail or sea before the monsoon strikes. Over 30 people died from diarrhoea at Vantharumoolai this month, and the rains will bring other epidemics. A Parliamentary delegation visiting the camp this month found the 40,000 population sharing 15 toilets.

Further south at Thambiluvil in Ampara District, there are 30,000 refugees, "herded like cattle", as one press report put it, into ten schools in the area without latrines or medical personnel.

Government figures for September say

Sri Lanka now spends Rs 10 million (\$250,000) a day on 931,000 people displaced since the June war but in many areas there is little sign of assistance. President Premadasa announced a crash housing programme for refugees earlier this month but critics say the east cannot even get tents as they are being sent to "model" camps for Sinhalese around Anuradhapura.

Budding politicians from the Lions Club and the Rotary Club in Colombo travel to Anuradhapura and are filmed distributing rice to the needy, for the benefit of future constituents. With the Muslim youth organisation FAMYS, working on behalf of over 100,000 Muslim refugees trapped in war-torn areas the refugee agenda is as politically polarised as any other in Sri Lanka.

In the North, relief is more uncertain. Over 11,000 refugees huddle in the shadow of Madhu Church in Mannar while fighting rages around them. There are over 100 pregnant women in the camp and no doctors. Somehow, 200 people a day leave Jaffna and are held overnight at the Government camp at Vavuniya. Many others may yet join them.

Mr Wijeratne makes a vow

SRI LANKA's Parliamentary bullring witnessed the following delicate encounter recently, between Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne and opposition MP SB Dissanayake. Nuwara Eliya MP Dissanayake told the House that on 6 September, Matara police paraded 6 JVP suspects outside Hakmana bank and shot them in cold blood. Their eyes were gouged out with a knife.

"Tie a pirith noola" suggested the abrasive Mr Wijeratne referring to a traditional Buddhist vow of protection.

Mr Wijeratne has taken a vow of his own to eradicate the JVP by any means at his disposal. Some say he gave the orders for JVP leaders Wijeweera and Gamanayake, to be killed in custody last November before they could throw themselves on the mercy of President Premadasa.

He has also repeatedly resisted attempts by MPs to claim compensation for families whose husbands or fathers have been killed by the Army or have disap-

peared. They are all JVP in his eyes and he will not give aid to the enemy.

His own side need no help. PFMD, an organisation of the families of the disappeared say another 28 bodies burning by

THE SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information processing service set up by the British Refugee Council to keep Sri Lankan refugees in Britain, Europe and elsewhere, informed about the current situation in their home areas.

If you have any information you wish to share, or any enquiries you wish to make regarding developments in Sri Lanka, contact

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the southern roadsides were found in the last two weeks and headless bodies have reappeared in the Kelani river, outside Colombo. Representatives of 4,000 PFMD families gathered in Gampaha for a meeting of solidarity on 22 September, despite posters which appeared in the town a few days earlier, warning people not to attend.

There is a sullen calm in the South and the banners of support for the war in the North - put up largely by departing Army divisions - are torn and frayed. Large number of detainees in southern Army camps are said to have died or disappeared as successive units left for the northern front. Robbery and violence are now endemic. Armed men in unmarked uniforms robbed Rs 500,000 from Am-balantota Cooperative Stores on 8 September and others robbed Rs 100,000 from bus passengers at Wellawaya south of Badulla a week later. No one knows whether they were Army, JVP or criminals. It is difficult to tell the difference.