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## Tigers take key Army base in Heroes Week offensive

IN A SURPRISE OFFENSIVE, guerrilla forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) captured the key Army base of Mankulam 35 miles south of Jaffna on 24 November in the bloodiest battle since the start of the June war.

After a two-day siege, 1,000 LTTE cadres overran the base killing 150 Sri Lankan soldiers. Another 100 escaped into the surrounding jungles where Army attempts to rescue them were hampered by torrential rains. The rescue attempt was accompanied by widespread aerial bombing throughout Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts causing heavy civilian casualties, LTTE sources say.

Observers believe the attack was the operational debut of two divisions of LTTE recruits enlisted in the euphoria after the Indian withdrawal in March. Tiger casualties numbered over 100.

The Mankulam attack was designed to launch a *Maveerar Varam* or Heroes Week in Jaffna - a propaganda offensive to commemorate thousands of LTTE fighters martyred in the struggle for independence. Its other purpose was to stiffen a civilian population reeling under six months of aerial bombing and near starvation.

Lonely coastal villages were festooned with black flags and the solemn portraits of young martyrs displayed beneath the Tiger flag in village squares. Mass meetings were held in Jaffna town in pitch darkness to elude the predatory bombers.

The day after Mankulam fell, President Premadasa flew immediately to Jaffna inside the "green line" of six miles of government-held territory around Palaly airbase to launch his own series of morale-boosting walkabouts for Sri Lankan troops. The President also visited the offshore islands of Nainativu and Kayts and addressed cadres of the pro-Government Tamil group EPDP who spearheaded the Army takeover of the islands in August at a cost of hundreds of civilian lives.

The Army cordon around Palaly has been regularly punctured by Tiger counter attacks.

An Army outpost at Maviddapuram was destroyed by a Tiger women's brigade in early November and 11 soldiers killed. The leader of the attack *Major Sanjika* was one of the Tiger fatalities. Two Army positions between Maviddapuram and Keerimalai fell into Tiger hands on 19 November and six soldiers killed.

The Army remains tightlipped about eventual military success in the North. On its own admission it holds less than 15% of Jaffna, 20% of Vavuniya, 20% of Mannar and 10% of Mullaitivu Districts. The taking of territory is meaningless against a guerrilla force, Army spokesmen insist, still smarting after the Mankulam attack. The winning of hearts and minds seems to mean even less as daily bombing raids over the Jaffna peninsula kill civilians and Tigers alike.

Mattivil North, Valikamam, Vadamaratchi and Point Pedro were badly hit by air raids this month and civilian casualties are in hundreds. Jaffna's growing medical crisis eased marginally when the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reopened Jaffna General Hospital on 8 November.

The following day, the 350 metre security zone around the hospital was bombed. Five people were injured and four hospital buildings badly damaged. Over 2,000 out-patients now arrive daily but there are serious shortages of blood, saline and anaesthetics. Pain-killing drugs, matches, batteries and fertilizer are currently banned from relief convoys to the North.

Heavy rains have caused food prices to fluctuate wildly but three ships now ply twice a month to the peninsula bringing a

total of 8,000 tonnes of food aid - about half of Jaffna's monthly needs. Norway has agreed to give \$3 million for Government relief to the North.

Six or seven lorries carrying relief aid organised by church NGOs still hazard the precarious North-west crossing into the peninsula at Pooneryn every week. But Pooneryn is regularly strafed by helicopter fire and government sources say a LTTE convoy was attacked in late November and 15 Tigers killed.

Increased surveillance and storms in the Palk Strait have cut refugee arrivals in south India to a few hundred this month. LTTE sources say six refugees were killed, fleeing from Analaitivu island to India, when the Sri Lankan Navy attacked their boat on 12 November.

Rajiv Gandhi, the godfather of India's new government told Parliament that Tamil Nadu was increasingly under LTTE control and new Indian Navy chief Vice Admiral Ramdas says all refugee arrivals must now be screened for militants. Police raided refugee camps and villages between Nagappattinam and Vedaranniyam in late November seeking LTTE hideouts.

Both Norway and Australia have offered to facilitate peace talks in the last few weeks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers. Mr Premadasa is likely to favour the Norwegian proposal given that Tigers are cajoling India to join the Australians as part of a Commonwealth peace initiative. Exploratory talks with the Government have clearly begun despite LTTE denials but diplomatic sources say the two initiatives are "ships that will pass in the night".

Other sources suggest Mr Premadasa is impatiently awaiting a benign astrological conjunction on 16 December which will effect a dramatic upswing in his personal fortunes. Whether these are the fortunes of war, or of peace is still unclear, but the day marks the beginning of the Tamil month of *Markali* - a month of darkness and foreboding. Mankulam will not go unavenged.

**After six months of bloody stalemate in the North-East war, the indiscriminate bombing of defenceless civilians in the Jaffna peninsula continues: the extra-judicial killing and disappearance of thousands of civilians in the East continues: the massacre of Sinhalese villagers in border areas continues: the persecution of the Muslim community continues. Comment on page Two.**



## COMMENT

## Riders on the storm

THERE ARE four horsemen who ride the Sri Lankan apocalypse in the North-East. The first supervises the daily indiscriminate bombing of defenceless civilians in the Jaffna peninsula by the Sri Lankan Air Force. The second is with the Army in the East applying the same terror tactics that smashed the JVP in the South - routine extra-judicial killings and wholesale disappearances.

The third rides the Tiger military maxim of *adi* - the diversionary strike designed to provoke first chaos and then retaliation - the massacre of unarmed Sinhalese villagers in border areas, the killing of hundreds of Muslims at prayer in the East in August, the expulsion of 50,000 Muslims from the North last month. Its aim is to inflame and polarise. It is the Tamil civilian who reaps the harvest of retaliation and is reminded why he needs the Tigers.

The fourth is silent. He is the eternal onlooker, the Colombo intellectual, the clergy, the journalist, the NGO protecting project work, the foreign government protecting its investments - the participants who claim to be observers. The letters smuggled out of Jaffna are full of anguish. "You must tell the world what is happening to us. What are you doing to help us?"

Earlier this month, Sri Lankan Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne gave one of his regular casualty updates for the June war. Some 756 security personnel have been killed and 457 reported missing. Another 1,663 have been wounded. Around 1,642 LTTE cadres had been killed said the Minister and 429 injured. No mention was made of civilian casualties, but for every combatant casualty there are at least two civilians killed or injured, giving total casualties of almost 10,000.

It is difficult to see the bombing of the Jaffna General Hospital this month as an accident when the Air Force has dropped bombs close enough to four other Jaffna hospitals in the last three months to set the occupants fleeing in terror. Expectant mothers miscarry, children marooned on amputated limbs lie screaming in the dark. What happens to those who cannot run, the old, the sick, the deranged?

Away from the hospitals the destruction is indiscriminate. A World Council of Churches delegation visiting the

North this month likened central Jaffna to "London during the blitz". Anything moving is a target sanctioned by air-dropped leaflets declaring indefinite curfew. But buildings do not move. Bombers flying at 5,000 feet do not know what they are looking for. The Tigers do not advertise their positions. The aim is to bomb the civilians out of the peninsula and trap the Tigers in a free-for-all fire-zone. To build a theatre of war by tearing down Jaffna. A theatre of cruelty.

In the East the Army rides the momentum of their macabre success in the South last year where 30,000 died in the abortive JVP insurrection. "If we were willing to kill our own people do you think we are worried about a few Tamils?", they will tell you.

Over 100 bodies were burnt outside Kalmunai when the Army arrived in early July. Over 150 refugees taken from the Vantharumoolai camp in September, allegedly released by the Army are still missing. Over 100 villagers taken to the Sathurukondan Army camp outside Batticaloa were shot dead according to one man who escaped with injuries.

A pile of 32 headless bodies was found on the beach at Akkaraipattu in Amparai District, last month. Their heads were taken off with a chainsaw. Amparai is the fiefdom of the police commando *Special Task Force*.

For the Tigers, the Army's excesses are heaven-sent. The LTTE will continue to attack Sinhalese villages in the dry zone and pick off Army patrols in the hope of further reprisals.

After the Tigers drove 50,000 Muslims from the North last month and the killings at Eravur and Kattankudy in August, the Muslims may never trust the Tamils again. They will not forget the baby who slipped from her mother's arms into the sea as thousands of Muslims fled by boat from Mannar to Kalpitiya. They will not forget the hundreds gunned down at prayer in Kattankudy?. Such is the philosophy of *adi*.

Far away in Point Pedro hospital in the Jaffna peninsula, an old man sits wearily gesticulating at his mouth to all who pass his bed. He wants something to eat. Bullets smashed most of his throat during a helicopter gunship attack on fleeing civilians in a nearby village. He will never eat or speak again. His silence is the price he has paid for ours.

## Attack

LTTE guerrillas stormed Halambagaswewa in the Welioya area of Vavuniya District on 1 November, killing 11 Sinhalese villagers and six soldiers.

## Flood deaths

Heavy flooding hit many districts in Sri Lanka's south and central belt after torrential rains in early November. Over 20 people drowned when a boat capsized carrying villagers to safety near Marawila 60 kms north of Colombo.

## Escape bid

An alleged LTTE leader jumped to his death from the notorious fourth floor of police intelligence headquarters on 5 November. He was one of 14 suspects held there.

## Hill Country roundup

Hill Country sources say there have been a spate of arrests of Tamil youths in Matale and Kandy Districts including many working in Colombo who returned for the Hindu Deepavali festival in October. There is still no news of those taken from Wategama town to Nawala Army camp.

## Budget blues

Opposition leaders condemned Prime Minister DB Wijetunge's budget in Parliament on 16 November as a "World Bank racket" after he announced plans to bridge a \$1.5 billion deficit for the coming year. The World Bank recommends Sri Lanka lose 90,000 public sector workers and cut back the *Jana-saviya* welfare programme. Income tax arrears in Sri Lanka last year totalled \$310 million.

## Expelled

Two leading members of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress were expelled by the party politburo on 17 November after they were accused of trying to extort Rs 2.5 million for a lawyer in Colombo by pretending to be Tamil militants.

## Returnees

Over 4,000 Sri Lankans were repatriated from Basra, Iraq in November by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Over 47,000 have been returned to Colombo from the Gulf since Iraq invaded Kuwait says IOM. There are a reported 50,000 Sri Lankan workers remaining in Kuwait.



*Government relief effort is running out of steam, say NGOs*

## Muslim refugees refuse to return to Mannar

THOUSANDS of Muslims forced out of Mannar District last month by a LTTE ultimatum have refused to return until the Army wipes out the Tigers, press reports in Colombo say.

Three Army divisions secured control of Mannar island in a five-day offensive in early November, but the repatriation of 20,000 Muslims by the Navy from Kalpitiya was cancelled when Mannar families refused to return.

Mohammed Zukir of Muslim youth organisation FAMYS said he would raise a paramilitary force of 15,000 youths to protect homes and families but other Muslim leaders are more cautious. An assortment of 17 Tamil and Muslim political parties have been locked in talks for the last three months trying to agree a formula for Muslim devolution under the

rubric of the Democratic People's Alliance (DPA) proposals.

The reasons behind the LTTE's ultimatum remain unclear but speculation is wide, ranging from a network of Muslim trader informers, attempts to start branches of Muslim militant group *Jihad* in the North and the arrival of a batch of tough Batticaloa LTTE cadres in Mannar District.

Thousands of Muslim refugees are now spread across Puttalam and Anuradhapura Districts others seeking shelter as far afield as Matale and Galle. Government Ministers and Muslim politicians take every opportunity to be photographed handing out food aid to the displaced - especially to the 2,000 arrived in Colombo but relief agencies say there is a new crisis on the horizon.

## *Jungle law in Batticaloa*

IN Batticaloa District, there is mounting concern for 60,000 refugees who fled to Paduwankarai, west of the lagoon after a Tiger communique closed Vantharumoolai camp in September. Many are camped in the jungle and the rains have brought sickness and snakes. Some ten people have died of snakebite at Mylawattavan said local people who brought 20 malaria cases to Batticaloa hospital by tractor in mid-November.

Transport is a continuing obstacle to effective relief. Drivers refuse point blank to venture into Tiger territory west of the lagoon or to stop at communal flashpoints such as Kattankudy and Eravur without massive cash inducements. Government Agent K Yoganathan says over half of Batticaloa's 400,000 population are now refugees and dry rations are reaching people only one week in three.

Batticaloa town remains tense. Muslim merchants are escorted in and out of Kattankudy and trading finishes by noon and the streets deserted. The Tigers move around the town with impunity, triggering incidents and vanishing. Seven police and 11 civilians were injured when a hand grenade was thrown at Batticaloa police station on 7 November and sniper attacks result in immediate reprisals.

Citizens Committee sources say 1,100 people have disappeared in Batticaloa District since the June war and another 800 in Amparai. Tiger sources say 30 men

rounded up from villages between Kallady bridge and Kirankulam were tortured and burnt alive at Arayampathy Army camp in late October. Over 150 men were rounded up in a *Special Task Force* operation in Karativu in Amparai District on 18 November but after the local Peace Committee interceded only six were detained.

West of the lagoon is Tiger country where Army patrols tread warily. Many are now led by cadres from Tamil group TELO and several soldiers and local TELO commander *Ravichandran* were killed in an LTTE ambush at Manmun-aithurai in early November.

## Operation Trincomalee

FIVE Sri Lankan Army divisions launched a three-week search and destroy mission north of Trincomalee town in early November, setting up new Army camps and securing the road 20 miles north to Irakkandy. Defence sources said nine LTTE camps in the Kumburupiddy area were destroyed. The offensive is a response to last month's reports that LTTE second-in-command *Mahattaya* had come east to target Trincomalee.

The town is quiet but 50 miles of road south to Habarana is swept for mines by Army sappers every morning before traffic is permitted. Business is returning to normal but the burnt-out hulks of shops and houses destroyed in June still domi-

The Ministry of Rehabilitation has been buying relief stocks on credit for the last three months but cannot meet its debt to traders and other ministries. The Cooperative Wholesale Establishment is owed Rs 107 million (\$2.5 million) and observers say the ensuing credit squeeze has already affected food aid.

For thousands of Tamils left on Mannar, shelling from Thallady army base on the mainland has destroyed over 50 fishing boats. Casualty figures for the Army offensive are still not known. Over 45 tonnes of food aid arrived on the island in early November but local sources say there is no adequate distribution system.

French doctors told Health Minister Renuka Herath visiting Mannar hospital on 10 November that there were serious medical shortages and no ambulance or telephone. On the mainland, control of Mannar District is still in contention as military operations continue.

In Vavuniya, the aftermath of heavy rains makes relief work in surrounding villages difficult. LTTE cadres are visible only two miles north of the town but after Mankulam local sources say the Army is preparing a massive cordon-and-search operation in the Vanni with sophisticated air and artillery support.

Further north in isolated Mullaitivu District, where there are 3,000 refugees from Trincomalee, naval patrols have affected local fishermen badly and many families are close to starvation. Soaring fuel costs and circuitous jungle routes to avoid mined roads mean the District is virtually cut off from relief convoys.

nate the commercial district.

The nightmare is not over, especially for those trapped in the limbo of refugee camps, denied sanitation and security. Sri Lankan soldiers surrounded Clappenberg refugee camp on 8 November and took 60 men into custody. Refugees in makeshift camps outside the town at Tambalakamam are badly hit by the rains and now lack shelter as well as food.

Disappearances continue. Asst. Postmaster S Rajalingam was abducted from his house on Kanthasamy Kovil Road, Trincomalee in mid-November and a few days later Peace Committee Secretary Gunaseelan disappeared on the road to Kumburupiddy after Army operations.



THE TAMIL MILITIAS WHO FIGHT AT THE ARMY'S SIDE

## Waiting in the shadows

Beneath the bewildering array of acronyms a vicious life-or-death struggle is underway among the Tamil militant groups. A generation is polarised a population sickened by violence. EPRLF and the other militant movements who fled to India have returned to fight beside the Sri Lankan Army. But who and what are they fighting for?

Amongst the Tamil militants there has always been a basic division. The LTTE and the rest. Since 1986 when the Tigers usurped the leading role by decimating militant group TELO, they have built a formidable fighting machine and regard themselves as "the sole legitimate representatives of the Tamil people". Apart from continuing personal links with the Marxist EROS group, they are implacably opposed to all the others.

Those others, the survivors of 36 militant movements in the last 20 years, EPRLF, PLOTE, TELO and ENDLF have successively sided with the Indian Army and now with the Sri Lankan Army knowing that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend".

EPRLF and the others ran the Indian backed Provincial Council regime in the North-East from November 1988 and were accused of widespread robbery and violence against Tamil civilians. Over 3,000 EPRLF and other cadres and their families fled with the Indian Army in

March fearing the consequences of the LTTE takeover. But now "the boys" are back, units working as scouts with the Sri Lankan military and others as *Talayati*, the feared hooded informers who identify LTTE suspects during Army cordon-and-search operations.

EPRLF have been sidelined after 12 of their leaders were assassinated in Madras in June allegedly by the Tigers. But a breakaway grouping the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) led by former EPRLF military commander Douglas Devananda has leapfrogged over the other movements, supplying advance units for the Army invasion of Kayts and Mandaitivu islands off Jaffna in August.

The groups divide the spoils of regional dominance. TELO are strong in Batticaloa, PLOTE in Vavuniya, ENDLF south of Batticaloa and a rump of EPRLF are said to be active in Trincomalee. Not much has changed. Although they describe themselves as doing "forward liaison" or relief and rehabilitation work,

there are the same stories of robbery and killing from Vavuniya and Batticaloa.

Joint hunting parties of PLOTE and TELO patrol the Batticaloa-Kalmunai road and on 11 November killed LTTE Navatkudah leader, *Thudeepan* in an ambush. Six other LTTE cadres supposedly took cyanide rather than fall into their hands. They lack however, the military might of the Tigers as the fate of their short-lived *Tamil National Army* proved, when deserted by the Indians last year. Without the Sri Lankan Army they are equally vulnerable.

But they are political parties as well as militias and seek to build up popular support as well as official patronage. Many of the leaders were in Batticaloa prison together during the famous militant breakout in 1983 and see themselves as elder statesmen of the struggle. EPDP are the coming force, and have further ingratiated themselves by hunting down 15 LTTE cadres in Colombo this month says Secretary General Ramesh. But there is little sign of a groundswell among ordinary Tamils who regard the militants as dangerous and unpredictable. Their aspirations to the middle ground do not match with their murderous reputations.

## Security forces stall JVP comeback

SECURITY FORCES have captured 41 year-old Daya Wanniarachchi successor to the leadership of the southern insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP) press reports from Colombo say.

Wanniarachchi, who was jailed with 40 other JVP leaders in 1972 after an abortive coup, replaced acting leader Somawansa Amarasinghe who has reportedly fled abroad. Amarasinghe was the only member of the JVP politbureau to escape the security forces *Operation Combine* which smashed the JVP leadership last November. The other six leaders were reportedly killed in police custody.

Wanniarachchi's arrest triggered a series of police raids in Kandy, Tangalle and Anuradhapura where a JVP leader was shot dead on 21 November while trying to escape. Police claim they have now broken JVP attempts to regroup. The JVP are said to have killed 6,500 people in the South since their second insurrection began with the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987. Government forces have been accused of as many as 50,000 deaths during the same period.

After a European Parliament human

rights delegation visited Sri Lanka last month, President Premadasa has set up a Committee headed by International Affairs Advisor Bradman Weerakoon to investigate human rights violations. Observers say the Committee is merely a palliative to allay international concern.

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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Sri Lanka's Bar Association (BASL) wanted an independent Commission of Enquiry with powers to examine witnesses and make recommendations.

There are still 14,000 youths in Government detention centres in the South in the wake of the JVP insurrection. Mr Weerakoon has been a voluble supporter of a Presidential Youth Commission report which recommends finite steps for the speedy rehabilitation of the detainees but there is little sign of implementation. The Jayalath Commission set up to screen out "subversives" among the detainees has so far identified only 1,987 as hard-core JVP.

Over 20 detainees were released during a police mobile service at Beliatta on 3 November but BASL say conditions in the camps are deteriorating and have called for lawyers to volunteer to visit Boosa, a major detention centre.

Over 2,000 people wrote to BASL's Human Rights Committee in November to register the "disappearance" of one of their family. Many of the disappearances are recent and include a number from the North-East.