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Army's final push on Jaffna

SRI LANKAN forces swept through six major islands west of Jaffna in a ten-day offensive in mid-October sealing off the peninsula in preparation for what military sources described as a "final push" on the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In a second phase, sea-borne troops secured beachheads on Jaffna's west coast at Poonagari and Arali south of Vaddukkottai while heavy shelling devastated Moolai close to the Punanai causeway, another possible invasion point. Both sides of the vital ferry crossing at Sangupiddy used by NGO relief convoys and civilians are now in Army hands and closed. Sri Lankan forces now control an arc of territory from northern Karaitivu to Vetrilaikerni five miles east of Elephant Pass camp, effectively cutting off the Jaffna peninsula from the mainland.

Thousands of civilians from Kerativu and the islands have taken refuge in

schools and temples in Jaffna town. Tamil sources say many civilians on Mandaitivu have been detained and questioned by Tamil group EPDP spearheading the Army advance across the Punnai causeway towards Jaffna fort.

The Tigers say they have stemmed the advance after fierce fighting at various points. LTTE commander-in-chief Velupillai Prabhakaran visited forward positions and thousands of civilians have been called up for civil defence duties. Neither side has released casualty figures. As the north-east monsoon broke in late October with 48 hours of continuous rain, Sri Lankan forces remain poised at the gates of Jaffna.

The offensive was accompanied by heavy shelling and aerial bombing throughout the peninsula. Vadamaratchi, Point Pedro, Kottady and the Hospital road area of Jaffna town have been badly hit. In areas such as Aral-

ithurai helicopter gunships drop flares while offshore gunboats shell through the night. A full scale propaganda war is also underway with the Army's Palaly radio station telling Jaffna residents they are surrounded and that troops may enter the town at any time. LTTE radio broadcasts are defiant urging people to stay calm.

Observers say the Army will not launch a full-scale assault on Jaffna town but having cut off critical supply lines will suck the enemy into large-scale battles in the hinterland to sap the Tigers' strength. Whether the five-mile cordon of landmines between Elephant Pass and Vetrilaikerni will hold the Tigers massing in Mullaitivu remains unclear. But the onset of the monsoon means the noose is already tightening. In late October LTTE units in Batticaloa and Amparai launched a series of diversionary attacks designed to draw Army units away from the North. The Army gains in Mullaitivu last month when they smashed a network of 14 LTTE bases remain fiercely contested and there is renewed fighting around Kokkilai.

Peace moves brokered by Tourism Minister S Thondaman fizzled out in late October after the Tigers rejected a 12-page programme for talks. A separate initiative involving an international Quaker peace delegation who visited Jaffna in early October yielded no immediate breakthrough. In a statement broadcast on Tiger radio on 1 November, LTTE leader Yogi said no negotiations were currently underway and for the Tigers to give up their struggle at this stage would be "suicidal".

The Tigers continue to hold out for talks without preconditions while the government demands a commitment to disarmament, the participation of Prabhakaran and the involvement of other Tamil groups. A discussion between Justice minister A C S Hameed and LTTE International Wing leader Kittu in Geneva in early October suggests the government can offer only the present provincial councils system as a formula for devolution. The deadlock will be broken it seems only by blood.

Premadasa routs impeachment rebels

THE constitutional revolt against President Premadasa's "one-man rule" collapsed 24 hours before a crucial vote of no confidence in the government when parliamentary Speaker M H Mohamed ruled he would no longer entertain a petition impeaching the President on 24 charges of corruption and abuse of power. Some of the signatures of 43 government MPs alleged to have signed the petition were invalid said Mr Mohamed.

The opposition, incensed, moved instead a motion of no confidence in the Speaker when Parliament re-opened on 8 October which they lost 123 - 85 two days later after a 12-hour debate. Colombo believes Mr Mohamed himself was one of the architects of the impeachment petition and at least one Tamil MP has sworn an affidavit saying the Speaker misled him into signing the document. A Sinhala newspaper also claims Mr Mohamed was paid Rs one million (\$25,000) to support the coup.

A breakaway faction of 12 MPs of the

ruling United National Party (UNP) led by Gamini Disanayake and Lalith Athulathmudali are expected to form a new party. Mr Athulathmudali said the struggle would continue to build a mass movement to restore parliamentary democracy.

Observers say Mr Premadasa has again displayed his mastery of political intrigue but that opposition claims that he supplied arms to the Tigers may damage him in the long term.

Rumours persist that Mr Mohamed will resign. All India Radio (AIR) correspondent A Karuppaswamy was expelled from Sri Lanka after AIR incorrectly announced the Speaker's resignation on 16 October. Editor Victor Ivan was questioned by police after a Sinhala weekly, *Ravaya* published the names of the 43 UNP MPs alleged to have signed the impeachment petition. A week earlier 45 government MPs were appointed to assist ministers with new development projects. Colombo believes the two groups to be virtually identical.

THE NORTH

The last battle?

THOUSANDS of Jaffna civilians have been called up for civil defence duties as the LTTE prepares a last-ditch stand against the encircling Sri Lankan forces. Coastal watch units and work brigades are being organised and schoolchildren summoned to give blood at hospitals. There is growing fear and uncertainty as Army radio broadcasts threaten the imminent invasion of Jaffna town.

Food prices have spiralled after three months of fighting at the edge of the peninsula and there are serious fuel and medical shortages. Rice remains at the LTTE fixed-price of Rs 35 a kilo when available, kerosene Rs 300 a bottle, firewood Rs 5 a stick. There is no wheat flour, dhal or sugar. After tortuous negotiations the Tigers have agreed to allow food relief to be unloaded at the Army-controlled port of Kankesanthurai after heavy rains shut down Point Pedro where *SS Kumana* waits offshore to unload 1,500 tons of food aid.

Jaffna requires over 15,000 tons of food aid a month to survive says the beleaguered civil administration. On paper the government sends around 7,000 tons by ICRC-chartered ships. Most months less than 4,000 tons arrive through administrative blunder or blockade. The lifeline comes from NGO food convoys and the "bicycle brigades" - thousands of Jaffna civilians who brave the week-long return journey to buy rice and kerosene in the markets of Vavuniya.

The Army-controlled artery at Elephant Pass is now the only exit to the south. The LTTE says it has heavily mined approaches to Elephant Pass and continues sniper attacks on the Army camp. Desper-

ate civilians using the back route through Chundikulam via Yakachchi face Army shelling and helicopter attacks.

Curfew was lifted in Vavuniya on 27 October as the Army pushed up to Nochchimoddu capturing the Tiger checkpoint at Santhasolai. Over 500 civilian traders stranded by the Army's Jaffna attack were taken to Vavuniya and screened by a masked informer. The Army is now said to be on the outskirts of Omanthai and in the west has pushed up to the ruins of Cheddikulam, the surrounding country deserted for miles. The LTTE is still active however and two soldiers were killed in an attack on Ulukulam 18 miles south-west of Vavuniya.

The government has ambitious plans to restore civil administration in Vavuniya and wants the Muslim community expelled from the North by the LTTE a year ago to return to Mannar District. Sir Abdul Ameer, President of the Muslim Refugee Relief Organisation says conditions remained too unstable and less than 80 of the 50,000 expelled Muslims have returned. The LTTE is still holding 15 prominent Muslim businessmen in the north, demanding Rs 5 million (\$125,000) each for their release.

In Jaffna, after 16 months of bombing and blockade the air is thick with desperation. Since 15 September, LTTE commander-in-chief Prabhakaran has ordered that all LTTE fighters killed in action are to be buried rather than the traditional cremation. Some say it is to save firewood or to avoid air attacks. The ceremonies remain lavish, strident and ominously defiant.

Muzzled

Police sealed the offices of Navamaga Printers in Colombo on 4 October following the publication of a special issue of the Sinhala weekly *Yukthiya* on the attempt to impeach the President. They also confiscated the proofs of a pamphlet linking Joe Sim, a casino operator and alleged drug-runner deported from Sri Lanka last February, with senior figures in the Premadasa government.

Conditions

The International Monetary Fund has laid down strict conditions for the disbursement of a \$455 million three-year credit line to Sri Lanka which include cutting welfare expenditure, privatising the estate sector and relaxing exchange controls. A \$40 million World Bank loan is being held up until there are further cut-backs in the public sector.

Shuffle

Army Chief of Staff Major Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne takes over as commander-in-chief of Sri Lanka's 77,000-strong Army on 15 November. Major Gen. Waidyaratne was a leading figure in the *Operations Combine* that smashed the JVP revolt in the south. The present commander Lt. Gen. Hamilton Wanasinghe will head a revamped Joint Operations Command.

Lawful

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled on 30 October that the expulsion of five Tamil asylum-seekers from Britain in February 1988 was lawful because it was not established that they would be tortured, punished or inhumanely treated on their return to Sri Lanka.

Tamil Nadu gets tough

OVER 1,000 south Indian police took part in *Operation Flamingo* launched in late September to clear LTTE bases from 500 kms of coastline south of Nagapattinam. Some 35 alleged smugglers including eight Sri Lankans were arrested and 500 kilos of explosives recovered. Since the crack-down on the smuggler-LTTE nexus began this year, 287 boats have been captured by Indian coastguards while attempting the 40-minute speedboat ride between Tamil Nadu and Jaffna.

The 110,000 Sri Lankan refugees in government-run camps in Tamil Nadu have been moved away from sensitive

coastal areas to 25 new reception centres in the interior. Another 110,000 Sri Lankan Tamils live with friends and relatives or on remittances from abroad. So far less than 30,000 have registered with local police and the others are now regarded as LTTE suspects. Another 2,060 identified as LTTE in the roundups since Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in May are kept in high-security isolation.

Arrests continue and both New Delhi and new Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha have vowed to break the grip of the Tigers on the southern state. The LTTE retains sophisticated links with

the former governing DMK party, as well as the south Indian Tamil fundamentalist Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and a range of new revolutionary groups.

Dindigul police arrested seven ring-leaders of the hitherto unknown Tamil National Liberation Army (TNLA) in late October. Police allege the LTTE gave TNLA leader Ravichandran, \$25,000 to foment a separatist revolt in south India and to restore secret radio links with Jaffna, severed since August. *Kolathur Mani*, said to be a close associate of LTTE leader Prabhakaran, was also arrested in Salem.

Trincomalee waits in vain for peace

Of homecomings and human shields

OVER 800 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India will be returned by ship to Trincomalee in mid-November, sources say, in a new programme aiming to repatriate 15,000 Tamils to the island. The returnees, Trincomalee government servants and their families, must return or lose their jobs. Speaking in Madras in late October, Sri Lankan International Affairs adviser Bradman Weerakoon said the situation in Trincomalee was now stable enough to facilitate the return. Tamil Nadu authorities say 3,500 refugees from the East and another 12,000 from Mannar have volunteered to return.

Trincomalee town remains a fortress surrounded by increasing LTTE activity in outlying areas of the district. The road south to Habarana opens at 8.30am after Army patrols sweep the route for land

mines. Women auxiliaries check vehicles in the town while armed police scrutinise nervous civilians from sandbagged positions. In both Tamil and Sinhalese quarters of the city, sit the hulks of burnt-out shops, houses and vehicles, millions of rupees of damage on display.

Fort Frederick, housing the government offices, is a fort within a fortress ringed by soldiers of the second Gajaba regiment. The civil administration is badly overstretched and under pressure from both the combatants. When a relief delegation from Tamil political parties in Colombo visited the town in mid-October, officials admitted that refugees who returned to their villages could not farm their land because of the ongoing fighting. President Premadasa visiting Trincomalee on 22 October, opened two new

housing projects and promised more relief for the beleaguered East.

Over 125 Army posts and detachments cover the district but beyond the town, fear and uncertainty thrive. The Morawewa road, where three Airforce personnel died in a LTTE ambush in late September, remains a flashpoint. A few days later, a Buffel armoured car was hit by a landmine near the naval headworks north of Trincomalee, killing three Navy personnel. Around Eechchilampattai, south of Koddigarai bay, destitute villagers have seen no food relief for months. A few miles north, at Seruwawila, four soldiers and four Home Guards died in a LTTE ambush on 29 October.

In the Weli Oya area in the far north of the district bordering Mullaitivu, 50,000 Sinhalese families have been settled since 1947 in what the Tigers see as a forcible "colonisation" of the area designed to drive a wedge deep into the continuity of the Tamil North-East. The area has a tragic history of massacre and reprisal and local LTTE commander *Nathan* has sworn to drive out the Sinhalese. Isolated jungle villages protected by Sinhalese Home Guards have become a human shield blocking the LTTE's movement south. The Tigers' strength lies in the coastal fishing castes and in a major clash near Kokkilai in mid-October, 60 LTTE and 13 soldiers were killed and 45 soldiers wounded.

Tigers strike back in Batticaloa

IN the wake of the Army's Jaffna offensive, LTTE units are mounting a series of diversionary attacks in Batticaloa, hoping to draw troops away from the northern battle zone. LTTE cadres attacked an Army foot patrol near Kokkaddicholai on 25 October, killing five soldiers and five civilians. The Army has responded with a major artillery offensive on the Eravur jungles west of Batticaloa lagoon where local LTTE commander *Karikalan* has his command and control centre.

Major cordon-and-search operations have continued throughout the month north of Eravur in Valachenai and surrounding villages. Large numbers of Tamil youths have been detained, some the brothers of suspected LTTE members. North of Valachenai on the Polonnaruwa road, LTTE units continue to infiltrate the approaches to the new Army base near Punanai. At least 14 soldiers and 13 Tigers were killed in a LTTE ambush near Welikande on 27 October.

Batticaloa town came to a standstill after a massive screening operation at Hindu College on 31 October. Over 20 LTTE suspects were arrested. Some 18 Tamil businessmen, attending a religious ceremony at the Kali Amman temple in Kaluwanchikudi, were kidnapped by the Tigers on 16 October as part of their regular fundraising activities. A ransom of Rs 3,600,000 (\$90,000) was demanded.

Batticaloa Government Agent K Dharmalingam says it is increasingly difficult to trace the displaced, staying with family and friends as refugees ebb and flow in the wake of Army operations. Food is again scarce and bakeries have stopped producing bread because of a flour shortage. Banks are also refusing to cash government teachers' salary cheques.

Gun law

A REPORT by Tamil group EPRLF says 13 Tamils were killed by Sri Lankan soldiers after a LTTE attack on 13th Colony of Central Camp in Amparai in early October. Five of the bodies were found in jungles close to Ranamadhu school. A woman S Ariyamalar (30) had been raped and hacked to death. After the incident over 5,000 frightened Tamils fled to villages in the Mandur area.

Muslim Home Guards also attacked Tamil villagers in the Thirukkivil area and two girls were raped. As Amparai's meagre Yala rice crop comes in, Home Guards are systematically looting newly harvested fields in many areas and tension is rising in Kalmunai and other Muslim-dominated areas. The LTTE continues to attack Sinhalese-colonised

areas and killed five Sri Lankan soldiers guarding farmers bringing in the harvest at Nugalanda in late October.

There was heavy fighting in the Kan-chikudichcharu jungles in early October as the Army's *Operation Red Arrow* got underway. Local people and tractors were used to support the troops. Large stocks of LTTE food and equipment were captured but no casualty figures have been released.

Further west in Badulla and other parts of the Hill Country, there have been large-scale roundups of Tamil youths, targeting those with relatives in the North. Over 10,000 plantation workers have threatened an indefinite strike if a suspended Walapane CWC union leader is not reinstated.

Refugee backlash in Europe

EUROPEAN countries are implementing a series of tough new asylum laws to stem the flow of refugees to the West, predicted to exceed 350,000 this year. Britain's new Asylum Bill introduces fingerprinting of all applicants, a "fast-track" appeal system to deport those refused asylum, cuts in housing assistance, visas for transit passengers and increased surveillance at foreign airports. Home Secretary Kenneth Baker admitted that under the new provisions, the 65% of applicants currently given leave to remain in Britain on humanitarian grounds would be substantially reduced.

Refugee groups in Britain mounted a ten-day picket of the Home Office while *The Guardian* (London) described the proposed legislation as "the National Humbug Bill" designed to disqualify the majority of applicants while pretending to streamline the system. Almost 50,000 asylum-seekers are expected in Britain this year and there is a backlog of 60,000 undetermined cases.

Sri Lankan asylum-seeker Sekharam Ratnakesan had his right leg sliced off by the Saarbrücken to Mainz express after right-wing thugs drugged him and dumped him unconscious on a railway line in southern Germany in mid-October. The 26 year-old Tamil who arrived in Germany two months ago, is in intensive care.

In recent months, France, Germany and Switzerland similarly tightened asylum laws and cut back on refugee assistance. The new European strategy seeks to shut the door on the "jet-age refugee" forcing him across land borders in his own unstable region or to seek an "internal flight alternative" in his own country. European Home Ministers met in Berlin on 31 October to determine new strategies to smash "the people trade" the lucrative immigration rackets that smuggle asylum-seekers to Europe on forged papers for inflated prices.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is high on Europe's agenda. There are over 200,000 Tamil refugees in Europe and another 25,000 expected this year. Swiss Foreign Minister Rene Felber visiting New Delhi in early October said over 20,000 Tamils had sought asylum in Switzerland and there was a growing law and order problem. The Tamils also have one of the most sophisticated escape networks operating throughout the East. Selvaraj Nirmalan was arrested in New Delhi in late October with 18 forged passports and large amounts of money. Another eight of his customers were arrested before leaving the country.

But refugee workers say asylum-seekers will be increasingly marginalised as a tide of racism and xenophobia sweeps across Europe manipulated by growing political movements on the right. There has been a spate of attacks on refugees, many of them Tamils in Germany and Switzerland. In 1992 the *Common European Home* will be no one's safe haven.

A taste of impunity

REPRESENTATIVES of 2,000 families whose husbands and sons "disappeared" in the brutal three-year struggle between the Army and the Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) gathered in Tangalle on 14 October to petition a five-member team from the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on a ten-day visit to probe Sri Lanka's human rights record.

Over 60,000 people have vanished in the wake of the Army-JVP conflict. Around 15,000 are detained under emergency laws although the Government claims to have released 6,422 after rehabilitation in the last 18 months. Human rights workers say some of those released have disappeared shortly afterwards and detainees who engage lawyers to assist their release have also vanished.

The UN team also visited Kandy and Hambantota assisted by opposition MP and Mothers' Front coordinator Mahinda Rajapakse. In Batticaloa Tamil MP P Joseph told the delegation 2,750 people in the district were missing since the June war. A submission from Tamil group EPRLF said over 6,000 people had vanished in the eastern districts of Trinco-

malee, Batticaloa and Amparai in the last 16 months of fighting.

In the south, police and Army operations against the remnants of the JVP continue. Some 17 suspects were arrested in Mityagoda north of Galle in mid-October and a JVP leader captured in Kosgoda, a few miles away. At Kalutara

prison, 248 Tamils from the North-East held without charges for over a year, staged a hunger strike to draw attention to their plight.

In the capital there is growing tension in the run-up to the SAARC summit - the annual meeting of the South Asian heads of government opening in Colombo on 7 November. Defence sources say several members of the elite Black Tigers suicide squad have been seen recently in the city, including munitions expert Ravi wanted in connection with the death of Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne and the destruction of Colombo's military headquarters in June.

A sustained attack on Christian NGOs accusing them of conversion activities and fraud dominated this month's hearings of the Presidential Commission of Enquiry on NGOs. Sources say Mr Premadasa is increasingly embarrassed by the Commission's combative stance but cannot wind it up without a Buddhist backlash. Next month the Commission investigates national development agency *Sarvodaya* and its charismatic leader A T Ariyaratne, a long-term adversary of Mr Premadasa.

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.

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