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State of siege

OVER one million people have been trapped inside the Jaffna peninsula for the last six weeks, after a 15,000-strong Army offensive sealed off the stronghold of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). All food convoys have been suspended and observers say the Army plans to starve the Tigers into submission.

Another 70,000 people fled the offshore islands west of Jaffna in the face of the Army's *Operation Valampuri* in October and food and medical supplies inside the peninsula are now critical. The Tigers refuse to allow food convoys through the Army-controlled artery at Elephant Pass saying approaches to the camp are heavily mined. It would also open up the only land bridge into the peninsula allowing an invading army easy access or a starving population an escape route.

The western ferry crossing at Sangupiddy is now one of the Army's gateways to the peninsula as Sri Lankan air and sea patrols prowl Jaffna lagoon seeking targets. The Tigers in turn have thrown a ring of bunkers around the Army's forward positions and in a LTTE counter-attack, ten soldiers were killed at Sangupiddy on 19 November.

The weak point in the Army blockade is a five mile stretch of open country east of Elephant Pass to the Chundikkulam coast. Hundreds of civilians waded waist-deep in monsoon rains through Kampotti Veli to spend the Hindu *Deepavali* festival with family in Jaffna in early November while many hundreds more are trickling out of the peninsula fearing a holocaust.

Army softens up Jaffna for final offensive

The Army anticipates a counter attack from the Tiger's Mullaitivu stronghold and in a combined ground-air assault, Sri Lankan troops destroyed two LTTE bases north of Kokkuthoduvai on 12 November described as the LTTE's Manal Aru headquarters. Further west the Tigers retain control of Kilinochchi where NGO food and medical convoys have been halted to prevent Elephant Pass being breached.

In late November, the Tigers finally agreed to allow food aid to Jaffna through the Army-controlled part of Kankasanturai, but heavy monsoon rains and monumental suspicion on both sides mean it will be no more than a trickle. Observers say the Army will now turn the screw on Jaffna to prepare for a military invasion in late January as the monsoon subsides.

As food stocks dwindle, Jaffna was a riot of colour and celebration in late November as the Tigers defiantly embarked on their annual *Mahaveerar Varam* or Heroes Week festival honouring 600 martyrs of the elite Black Tiger commando squad killed in suicide attacks. Government forces marked the event with a week-long curfew and air-and-sea bombardments of Valvettiturai, Chavakachcheri and Kachchai. The festival's climax was a huge open-air rally on 27 November where LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran told the crowd that the Tigers would never give up their struggle for *Eelam* - an independent homeland - but were willing to hold

peace talks with the government without preconditions. Recent statements by President Premadasa and leading figures in his government suggest they will talk peace only after a military victory. The Army, poised at the gates of Jaffna will not be cheated of the spoils of war as it believes it was by the intervention of India during the Army's invasion of the Jaffna peninsula in July 1987.

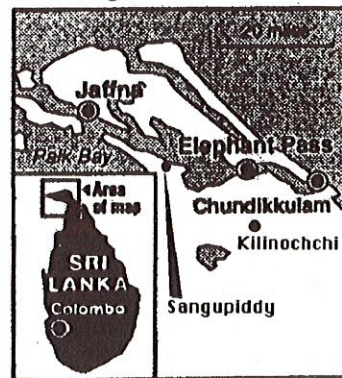
Some sources say Mr Premadasa, to stay in power, must give the Army what it wants but it is also clear that the President would prefer to destroy the Tigers than to make a deal. The cat-and-mouse game continues as Colombo and Jaffna trade peace terms through a series of letters to Tourism Minister S Thondaman.

The latest LTTE epistle asks the government to put forward a credible alternative to *Eelam* and offers an internationally supervised ceasefire and disarmament after a settlement is reached. The government has deferred the offer to the limbo of the All Party Conference and has thrown the ball back into the Tigers' court asking them what they will accept instead of *Eelam*. Colombo is unlikely to take the Tigers' next response too seriously, believing any further concessions to be a ruse or a sign of impending collapse.

There remains only ritual optimism over a New Year ceasefire and the distant concern of the international community. When the monsoon storm clouds clear over Jaffna in late January, there will be no more talking.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE for peace talks began almost immediately the war of June 1990 broke out, but with little tangible results. Australian premier Bob Hawke wrote to Mr Premadasa, a few weeks later offering to mediate but was diplomatically rebuffed. The Norwegian government offered to host and finance peace talks in Oslo, but to no avail. The Commonwealth's Secretary General Chief Emeka Anyaoku also offered to intervene but was refused. There were rumours of a Malaysian initiative in April and Swiss Refugee Minister Peter Arbenz in Colombo in July, offered to organise peace talks in Geneva.

Successive Indian leaders have blown hot and cold on peace but New Delhi now wants LTTE leader Prabhakaran dead to atone for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. In early December British NGOs wrote to the Commonwealth's Chief Anyaoku asking him to redouble his peace efforts before thousands more lives are wasted in the North-East war.



The noose tightens on the north

OVER 70,000 people have fled into the Jaffna peninsula in the wake of Army operations on the western islands of Karaitivu and Kayts say the Jaffna Red Cross Society, stretching relief services to breaking point. Meal packets and 2,000 sleeping mats have been supplied but there is just not enough to go around. Over 200,000 of Jaffna's one million plus population are refugees from outside the peninsula and thousands more internally displaced by bombing raids on their villages.

Thousands of Jaffna civilians launched two protest marches on 18 November to the *Kachcheri*, Jaffna's civil administration centre, demanding an end to the economic blockade and immediate food and medical supplies. Outside the *Kachcheri* the protesters gave a ritual cremation to the effigy of a local man said to have died from starvation.

The medical situation is now critical with over 100 cases of cholera admitted to Jaffna hospital in the last two weeks. Seven have died including three from Navatkuli refugee camp. There is now typhoid and as the rains increase, widespread diarrhoea. Without antibiotics and painkilling drugs, there is also despair. Ayasamy Velu, an elderly man suffering from a urinary disease hanged himself in Jaffna hospital in mid-November. The Tigers are promoting a resurgence of indigenous Tamil medicine in the face of the shortage of western drugs.

There are signs of desperate ingenuity everywhere - cars that run on vegetable oil - but when the food runs out Jaffna will fold like a pack of cards. The peninsula is now cut off from its vital rice fields in Kilinochchi and Kilinochchi severed from

its only hospital facilities in Jaffna.

The fighting of the last three months has also taken its toll on the Tigers. A commemoration volume released after the struggle for Elephant Pass admits to 579 deaths and 1,800 wounded. Training of civil defence brigades and coastal watch units is now a priority. As the Army encircled Jaffna the LTTE mounted a series of public executions of "traitors" to stiffen civilian resistance. Fears are growing for three human rights workers detained by the Tigers in August.

Outside Vavuniya in Nochchimodai the checkpoint that connects the Tiger north with the Army-controlled south, civilians still run the gauntlet to buy food, collect money in Colombo or help sick relatives. Bicycles, Jaffna's unofficial relief shuttle, are now banned to further tighten the blockade. Four people were seriously injured in early November in a landmine blast when 5,000 people flooded off the road into surrounding fields. A few miles away seven soldiers and a policeman were killed in a LTTE attack at Mamaduwa on 28 November.

West of Vavuniya in remote Mannar, a low-intensity conflict continues as government forces mass for a fresh offensive. Over 26,000 refugees remain trapped in the war zone at a UN-run camp at Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine at Madhu.

In Jaffna schools while the bombers drone overhead, children chant the Tigers catechism, "the New History", glorifying *Eelam* and the might of ancient Tamil warrior-kings. Children who have grown up knowing nothing but the power of the gun.

Refugees

North-East brief

Over 1.7 million of the North-East's 4 million population are officially destitute with 253,937 refugees in camps, 419,748 displaced from their homes and another 1,090,961 "economically affected". The government still plans to cut food aid to refugees outside camps by the end of the year and has cut dry rations by 10% this month.

West protests

Over two thousand Muslim refugees protested in Puttalam 80 miles north of Colombo in early November on the first anniversary of a LTTE ultimatum that forced 50,000 Muslims out of the North. Tension is growing in Puttalam where there are 30,000 Muslim refugees, many squatting on private land.

Tamil Nadu

Sri Lanka has postponed the first repatriation of Tamil refugees in south India. Over 53,000 of 110,000 Sri Lankan refugees in camps have completed a questionnaire and 16,663 have agreed to return. There are another 110,000 Sri Lankans in Tamil Nadu living with relatives and friends.

Europe

A group of 13 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers were arrested by Norwegian police at Svinesund on 26 November, while crossing the border illegally from Denmark. They had each paid Rs 350,000 (\$8,750) to agents in Colombo. There are 200,000 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers in Europe and another 25,000 expected this year.

LTTE arms ship seized off south India

AS the crackdown on LTTE supply lines continues, the Indian navy seized the *SS Tongnova*, laden with arms and ammunition, off the Tamil Nadu coast on 8 November. Documents recovered from the crew of ten reveal comprehensive details of the LTTE arms trade centred in Singapore and the movements of three tankers which stay in international waters feeding vital supplies to smaller vessels for the Jaffna run. Indian intelligence claims a major breakthrough and new Sri Lankan Army Commander Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne has opened discussions to increase joint surveillance in the Palk Strait.

A senior LTTE operative Gundu "Fat"

Santhan took cyanide when cornered by Indian police in a Trichy suburb on 13 November. Sources say Santhan was the LTTE paymaster in Tamil Nadu and Trichy the major supply depot and logistics nerve-centre. Police say with the death of Santhan and the escape of another LTTE lynchpin *Kanthan* to Jaffna, all the major players in the Gandhi assassination plot are accounted for. Some 25 militants have taken cyanide since the investigation began.

The south Indian Tamil fundamentalist Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and the former governing DMK party are now distancing themselves from the Tigers as

details emerge of their complicity in LTTE attacks, including the murder of EPRLF leader Pathmanabha and 14 others in a Madras suburb in June 1990. Madras lawyer Maruthanayagam is accused of sheltering Padmanabha's murderers and 18 others have been arrested in connection with the crime. There are calls for the resignation of DMK politician Gopalaswamy, a confidante of Prabhakaran, after his brother Ravichandran was arrested last month as ring leader of one of 20 little-known groups promoting separatism in Tamil Nadu. New Chief Minister Jayalalitha is hitting the Tigers where it hurts.

Hate, fear and the invisible front-line in the east **Killing grounds**

ARMY units launched fresh offensives in the east this month after a string of successful attacks by the LTTE Batticaloa leader *Karikalan* on border areas of Polonnaruwa. In *Operation Boomerang* launched in northern Batticaloa in early November, new Chinese F7 jets strafed the Eravur jungles while in cordon-and-search operations in Ambilanturai, Kanakudah and Kallady several suspected militants were arrested and others shot dead.

The Army claims *Karikalan's* *Beirut* base camp was located and extensively damaged in the offensive but it has not hindered the Tigers' operational mobility. Over 20 soldiers died in a LTTE ambush at Sinhapura on the Polonnaruwa road on 20 November. The Tigers say they have formed their own civilian Border Guard units and plan their own "colonisation" programme to push Sinhalese settlers out

of the areas of Polonnaruwa and Amparai, they regard as *Tamil Eelam*.

There are officially 11,000 refugees in camps and another 56,000 with relatives in Batticaloa but relief officials say the real figure is about double - half the District's population. Many have seen no food relief for weeks, others not at all.

Tamil refugees from Manjanthoduva near Kattankudy refuse to return home while Tamil-Muslim tensions remain high. Almost 2,000 homes are now occupied by the Army in Batticaloa District. Tamil villagers from Vellaveli in southern Batticaloa, where LTTE commander *Karuna* ranges deep into Amparai, cannot return to their villages without food clothing and protection says SLFP district organiser K Sabaratnam. Nearby Thantiramalai refugee camp was burned to the ground in this month's Army operations.

There has been a spate of mystery killings around Kakkaddicholai where the Army massacred over 120 civilians in June. Sources say the Army killed Mahiladitivu's village headman in mid-November to prevent him giving evidence to the Commission of Enquiry. A Tamil woman Kamaladevi Jeevaratnam was shot dead in Kakkaddicholai temple a few days later and the Commission's hearings have been postponed as tensions rise in the area. Extortions and kidnappings by the LTTE continue and R Mahadevan a civil engineer was abducted at Sithandy on 17 November on his way to a Provincial Council meeting in Batticaloa.

Further south in Amparai the Tigers have demanded a Rs 2.5 million (\$62,500) ransom for the release of five women kidnapped in Annamalai two days earlier. The Army's *Operation Dragnet* launched in Amparai early this month spread fear and dislocation throughout the population. There were large scale roundups in Pottuvil and the surrounding Thagarampalai jungles where the Tigers launched an inconclusive counter-attack.

The Army claims three Tiger bases were destroyed near Vembiyadikulam and large arms stocks recovered. As the roundups continued in Pallimunai and Bakiella over 60 LTTE suspects were detained in Thirukkivil in a *Special Task Force* operation in late November.

Ravi's story

RAVI hesitates as he speaks looking instinctively over his shoulder. The story he tells is full of familiar brutal detail. When the Army took Trincomalee in June 1990, the Tamil population was paraded on the beach at 4 am in front of masked informers while burning shops and houses formed a ghostly backdrop. Over 80 suspects were bludgeoned to death with rifle butts in the morning mist.

Ravi's elderly parents escaped with the Tigers in a civilian convoy. His father hit by shell fire was evacuated to a vast cathedral-like LTTE underground hospital base in the middle of the jungle before reaching Jaffna by boat. Ravi lived through the months of disappearances and casual killings that followed in Trincomalee. Two friends who set out by car from Colombo never arrived. He watched as a friend's wife was taken from her workplace by men in unmarked uniforms, never to be seen again.

Trincomalee is today an armed citadel surrounded by a sea of jungle and civilians both harbouring LTTE. The disappearances and killings go on. Four Tamil men Rajendrarajah, Thiagarajah, Jeyarajah and Mar-kandu disappeared in separate incidents involving the Army in the Muthur area in August and September. The nearby Army camp at Kattaiparichchan is a favourite Tiger target. At Vepankulam in another LTTE raid in mid-November large numbers of soldiers were killed as the Tigers keep up the pressure on the Army in the rural areas. But when the Tigers score a hit, in the eerie silence that follows it is the people who are made to pay.

Unrest in the hills

POLICE say they have smashed a major LTTE network in the Hill Country after 50 Tamil youths were rounded up in late November. Some 17 allegedly from Tamil group EROS were arrested in Uva and a high-powered radio, 50 kilos of gelignite and automatic weapons recovered. Police say they were planning to attack Sinhala villages during the Tigers' "Heroes Week" in late November.

Another 30 were arrested in Badulla and Passara areas. The Plantation's leading Trade Union, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) say they have been arrested because they fled as refugees to Batticaloa during the 1977 or 1983 violence and have no militant connections. The CWC has called for their immediate release.

Court proceedings opened in late

November against former CWC official and Up Country People's Front leader P Chandrasekaran, accused of involvement in the LTTE's bombing of Colombo military headquarters in June. A medical report produced in court confirmed Chandrasekaran was extensively assaulted in police custody.

The CWC and its charismatic leader Tourism Minister S Thondaman have decided to back controversial plans to privatise part of the estate sector. The estates were nationalised in two stages in 1972 and 1975 introducing a long period of industrial unrest. Now the government through its Plantation Redevelopment Committee says 450 estates will be handed back to 22 companies each with a separate committee to protect workers' rights.

Summit setback in Colombo

INDO-SRI LANKAN relations took a further jolt when the long delayed Colombo summit of regional heads of government - the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) - collapsed after the non-appearance of the King of Bhutan and Indian premier P V Narasimha Rao on 7 November.

Bhutan's withdrawal, engineered by India say cynics, allowed Mr Narasimha Rao to stay at home where he had more pressing interests - being elected to Parliament with a record 500,000 majority. Rumours began two months ago that India would sabotage the summit after the Sri Lankan government acknowledged that it had supplied arms to the Tamil Tigers to force out Indian troops from the north.

The admission, part of the vicious fighting in Sri Lanka's ruling United National Party (UNP) during the attempted constitutional coup in September opened an old wound and Mr Rao's recalcitrance was a calculated snub to Colombo, observers say.

Honour was somehow satisfied and a

one-day SAARC summit has been rearranged for 21 December, despite ever-present fears that the LTTE appears to penetrate Colombo at will with often devastating results. The capital has undergone an expensive facelift and hundreds of beggars have been forcibly removed to special camps outside the city.

The constitutional revolt against Mr Premadasa's "one man rule" however, rumbles on and eight MPs from the UNP rebel faction led by former ministers Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake were expelled from the party on 3 December after losing a court appeal. The MPs also lose their seats in Parliament but have formed a new party, the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) and say they will continue their campaign with other opposition groupings to restore parliamentary democracy. Speaking at a rally at Embilipitiya, Mr Athulathmudali called for a referendum to do away with the all-powerful executive presidency. A bomb exploded at another rally held by the dissidents in Pannala on 2 November injuring 11 people.

Observers say a new jigsaw of opposition coalitions is likely as speculation grows that Mr Premadasa will call a general election early next year. Chandrika Kumaranatunga, daughter of opposition SLFP leader Mrs Bandaranaike, rejoined the SLFP with 16 of her BNP party in late November as she prepares a challenge to her estranged brother Anura for the SLFP leadership.

If some of the elusive 43 UNP MPs who signed the September impeachment petition are dropped by Mr Premadasa at the next election, they will throw their weight behind the opposition bandwagon, further tilting the balance.

Widespread demonstrations and arrests have returned to southern universities over government plans to fund new affiliated university colleges from the existing education budget. Observers say the protests are propelled by the Buddhist Jathika Chintanaya and fear a resurgence of JVP violence. Senavi Ayah, a JVP regional leader escaped from Welikade prison in mid-November but was recaptured by Galle police a few days later.

Mr Wijetunga's "one-legged" budget

THE 1992 budget presented in Parliament by Prime Minister D B Wijetunga this month shows Sri Lanka continues to live beyond its means with an overall budget deficit of Rs67 billion (\$1.7 billion) and a cluster of tax holidays for private enterprise.

A range of indicators suggests however significant improvements with 5% economic growth this year, unemployment down to 11%, savings up to 18% of GDP and the external debt service ratio down to 14%, mirroring growing investor confidence. There was little however in the budget for the poor with a 20% increase on milk powder, while staple food prices continue to soar.

The government has what it describes as a "two-legged" economic strategy for '92, combining a market-oriented modernisation policy with interventionist self-employment welfare programmes spearheaded by its *Janasaviya* poverty alleviation programme. But there was little sign of the second leg in Mr Wijetunga's budget and economists say the two limbs must work together if the Sri Lankan economy is to walk again. The third round of the *Janasaviya* programme begins next year and the Planning minis-

try says 60% of 269,924 families participating in the scheme now earn over Rs1,5000 (\$40) a month.

While the World Bank has commended Sri Lanka's economic performance, *Janasaviya* and Mr Premadasa's privatisation or "peoplistisation" of state companies have been heavily criticised. Economists say current government pol-

icy is contradictory, boosting entrepreneurial efforts while deficit financing crowds out the private sector, pushing up interest rates. Official inflation figures are around 15%, the real rate is nearer 25%.

Over half the budget deficit is currently bridged through foreign aid and observers say that Sri Lanka's shaky human rights record will again be on the agenda at the next Sri Lanka World Bank meeting in Paris in February. A delegation, led by Mr Premadasa's international affairs adviser, Bradman Weerakoon, launched a whistle-stop tour of European governments in late November to solicit continued economic support.

Responsibility for implementing much of the *Janasaviya* poverty programme will fall on NGOs and the current NGO Commission of Enquiry in Colombo seeks to identify compliant organisations and to purge political opponents and human rights agencies on the way.

A report by the International Commission of Jurists released this month talks of "a palpable fear of victimisation" by NGOs and calls for the government to re-examine the Enquiry's mandate and operation.

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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