

Mass exodus from Jaffna

OVER 250,000 civilians fled in panic from the besieged city of Jaffna in late October, after a ten-day running battle with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) brought 20,000 Sri Lankan troops to the edges of the town.

In *Operation Sunray* launched on 15 October, two Sri Lankan columns punched south from Atchuveli and Valikamam with heavy air and artillery cover. The heaviest fighting was around Neerveli where the LTTE has key installations including an underground hospital, but the Tigers' teenage guerrillas could not stem the Army advance.

Over 1,000 LTTE were killed claim Sri Lankan Defence sources in the heaviest fighting of the 12-year civil war. Over 220 soldiers were killed and 540 wounded. There are no independent reports of the fighting.

Over 150 civilians are reported killed in two major Army operations in four weeks including nine elderly men who died when a Tiger mortar shell struck an old people's home in the military advance on Puthur on 6 October. Another 15 people, two families, died in a direct hit on a home-made bomb shelter as Sri Lankan air attacks intensified.

In late October, the Tigers ordered civilians to evacuate Jaffna town. Thousands of people packed the road south-east to Chavakachcheri in a human tide of misery, lashed by monsoon rains as the Tigers fought to hold Navatkuli bridge. Ten people were killed in an air attack on a makeshift refugee camp at Ariyalai a few miles south, LTTE sources claim.

A few days later, the Tigers announced the civilian administration was withdrawing from the town but it remains unclear whether LTTE will leave the town without a fight. Over 30,000 people too old or too sick to flee are still

Troops smash Tiger resistance

in the ICRC demilitarised zone around Jaffna General hospital.

The military will not rush into Jaffna fearing a trap. Approach roads will be heavily mined and there are rumours that the Tigers have prepared chemical weapons. Defence spokesman Capt. Sarath Munesinghe says the heaviest fighting is still to come.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge promised a quick end to the war in a major speech on state radio and television but warned that the Tigers would launch fresh retaliatory attacks on Colombo after LTTE suicide squads blew up the country's major oil refinery in the city's southern outskirts on 20 October.

Over 1,000 Tamils were arrested in the capital in major security sweeps in late October. All but 65 were later released. The government has ordered all schools throughout the island closed for a month, fearing a Tiger attack on the children of Colombo's elite.

The focus is now on 400,000 people from Jaffna and its northern satellite villages huddled in over 60 makeshift refugee camps in temples and schools in tiny Chavakachcheri five miles south-east of the town. There is little food and no shelter for many forced to sleep under trees. Heavy monsoon rains and poor sanitation bring the threat of cholera and water-borne diseases.

Over 60,000 people are waiting to cross the Jaffna lagoon at Kilali, a few miles south where the Tiger ferry point to the LTTE-controlled mainland town of Kilinochchi is working day and night evacuating 5,000 people every 24 hours.

United Nations Secretary General Dr Boutros Boutros Ghali has appealed to both sides and to the international community for immediate assistance for the thousands displaced to avert a major humanitarian

crisis. The Sri Lankan government has refused to declare Chavakachcheri as a safe haven, accusing the Tigers of using civilians as a human shield to cover their escape. The mass exodus effectively blocks Sri Lankan troops from the Elephant Pass base south east of the lagoon, closing the trap around Jaffna town.

The military may have won the battle but not the war. Like the Indian invasion of Jaffna in 1987, the Tigers will slip out of the peninsula and into the dense north-east Vanni jungles where they have substantial bases to open a new front. LTTE supreme commander Velupillai Prabhakaran is already in Mullaitivu and with him as in 1987 are thousands of new teenage volunteers from Jaffna town to be hardened by months of jungle training.

The east looks increasingly vulnerable after large-scale troop withdrawals to man the Jaffna offensive and the Tigers will seek to turn the tables and corral the military in the peninsula by severing its major supply routes.

But the retreat from Jaffna will raise new questions over Prabhakaran's hold on the Tiger movement and the Tamil people. After four years of virtual statehood in the north many may see the return to the jungles as humiliation or a betrayal.

What the military will do with Jaffna town and how they will hold it may be an equally vexing question. Most civilians will fear military reprisals and will attempt to escape to Kilinochchi rather than return to the town.

Another 400,000 people, 50% of Jaffna's population, remain penned in the peninsula's north-east enclave around Point Pedro. The government now seems determined to prevent the Tigers' building up buffer zones and will block food aid to both Point Pedro and Chavakachcheri to push civilians back into Army-controlled territory or out across the lagoon. The human cost will be high.

Colombo is bracing itself for further Tiger reprisals after the military's successful Jaffna offensive. Tiger guerrillas blew up the country's major oil refinery on 20 October causing \$25 million damage. Security sweeps of the capital have intensified and Human Rights Task Force chief CT Jansz says over 600 people are held illegally and remain at risk. More details on page four.

THE NORTH

Forced out

AS thousands of civilians flee along the northern shore of Jaffna lagoon, relief efforts are being systematically blocked by the Sri Lankan government. Colombo seeks to force civilians out into government-controlled areas rather than send food aid into Tiger-controlled territory.

In early October, Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K Ponnambalam launched a series of increasingly desperate appeals warning there were only two weeks buffer stocks of food aid left in the peninsula. Mr Ponnambalam's administration has regrouped at Hindu College, Chavakachcheri where upwards of 300,000 people are crammed into every available building. Local and international NGOs have opened an inter-agency relief office in the town but resources are marginal. Food and plastic sheeting for shelter are urgently required and local prices are spiralling. Painkilling drugs, antibiotics and bandages are in short supply and there are now no effective or secure supply routes.

An ICRC ship loaded with 2,000 metric tonnes of flour and medicine for Point Pedro in the LTTE-controlled north-east tip of Jaffna peninsula is still waiting to sail in Trincomalee harbour.

The other half of Jaffna's 800,000 population is clustered around Point Pedro and Valvettiturai, the symbolic birthplace of the Tiger movement and LTTE leader Prabhakaran and the Army means to flatten it not to feed it. The road from Point Pedro to Chavakachcheri could be cut at any moment say the military darkly.

Chavakachcheri is not a promising site for a large-scale relief effort. Lack of logistics and sanitary provision means the high water table will quickly become polluted and threaten cholera and other water-borne diseases. Thousands more people will cross the lagoon to Kilinochchi but the military will not permit the Tigers to rebuild a second citadel within such easy reach of their real stronghold - the Vanni jungles of Mullaitivu.

Kilinochchi's hospital and miles of good rice land offers only a temporary staging post. Local NGOs are already opening scores of temporary refugee camps in small villages in the hinterland.

Analysts say the relief blockade will intensify to try and force thousands of civilians south to the Army-controlled town of Vavuniya run by anti-LTTE Tamil group PLOTE, where UN-administered refugee camps can be expanded to create a "holding zone" to suck out the Tigers' civilian support base. Colombo has long had contingency plans to buttress the south from Tiger suicide bombers by turning Vavuniya into a vast Tamil refugee camp.

Further north thousands of people are on the move as the monsoon rains heighten. This is the season of eye-sickness, *kan noi*, diarrhoea and snakebite. Thousands caught in the open especially children will be stricken. The military's message is increasingly clear. The days of sending food aid to enemy-controlled territory are over. If you want food and shelter cross the front line.

Floods

Over 20,000 families were flooded out after torrential rains lashed Ratnapura in Sri Lanka's south-west in early October.

Assassins

Four bodyguards of Douglas Devananda, leader of Tamil party EPDP were shot dead in a failed assassination attempt on the MP at his Colombo home on 9 October. Police blamed the Tigers but other sources pointed to Colombo politicians.

Amendment

After mounting criticism, the Sri Lankan government says it will amend its devolution package, empowering the President to dissolve any Regional Council "acting against national interests".

Attack

A *Black Tiger* suicide commando blew up a government supply ship to the north in Trincomalee harbour on 17 October.

Executions

Travellers from the north say LTTE publicly executed 29 "traitors" at Omanthai junction on 26 October, leaving their bodies where they fell as a warning to others.

Alert

Airports in south India were on red alert in late October after reports that LTTE planned to hijack an aircraft in Madras to force India to release Tiger cadre on trial for the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

terror road

A HANDFUL of Jaffna civilians crossing into Army-controlled territory at the northern frontier town of Vavuniya have spoken of the horror of the mass exodus from Jaffna.

Mallika, her two children clutching her sari, sobbed as she described how old people and children were crushed underfoot as thousands of civilians fled Jaffna in panic after the Tigers toured the town with loudspeakers announcing "a demonic force will attack us from several directions. We will respond likewise. Since we are going to resist every inch against a state drunk with racism, you people must evacuate this same night".

It took an hour just to move a few yards she said, lashed by monsoon rains and the ominous thump of Sri Lankan artillery ever closer. A medical student told the BBC that there was no food in Jaffna and no money to buy it. Banks were closed and the vegetable supply to the city was cut by the Army's capture of the fertile agricultural areas north-west of the town.

In the hours before the evacuation the mood was increasingly desperate. "We have declared a state of emergency in Jaffna, asked for the total mobilisation of the people and the enlistment of youth to resist the Army" LTTE international

spokesman Lawrence Thilagar told *Reuters* from Paris. Thousands of youth have enlisted but many Jaffna civilians are bitter and war-weary. Teachers refused to help when the Tigers came to colleges on a recruiting drive. "We can't go to homes and ask parents to give up another son and daughter" they told a priest quoted in the London *Independent*. The Tigers already demand the enlistment of one child from each Jaffna family or a cash payment of Rs 50,000.

But the fear of the military is stronger. The roads out of Jaffna are churned to a quagmire by incessant rains and the pounding of thousands of frightened feet.

■ *Revenge killings plague the east*

Hit and run

BATTICALOA Deputy Mayor Thomas Anthony, 33, was shot dead while playing football at Kallady three miles south of Batticaloa town on 27 October. Although the lone assassin was not identified, the LTTE is strongly suspected.

Tamil internecine killings in Batticaloa continue. Former TELO member K Thangavadiel was shot dead on 3 October at Sithandy. The following day K Govindarajah was killed at Santhiveli. A gunman rained bullets on the EPRLF office on Rest House Road in Batticaloa town on 30 October injuring four. Two cadre died later in hospital. The attacker has been identified as Jayaseelan, a constable at the Kalmunai police station.

Over 60 soldiers and 15 LTTE were

killed when the Tigers halted a major military push down the Chenkalady-Maha Oya road at Thambiluvil in mid-October. Sources say the military has played down the casualty figures. A Special Task Force (STF) patrol was ambushed by the Tigers on 9 October at Pulkunava south-west of Batticaloa. Eight STF were killed and seven others injured.

Five Tigers died in an Army ambush at Sithandy on 22 October. The Defence Ministry says a LTTE attack on 28 October at Kalmadu south-east of Valaichenai was repulsed by the Army. Three Tigers were killed and three soldiers injured in the clash. Seven year-old Yesuthasan Thiruvan and Velan

Rasammah, 45, were killed when the military shelled Murakottanchenai. Fourteen others were injured.

The LTTE continued to target electricity transformers. A transformer at Sithandy was damaged on 5 October. Another on Govindan Road in Batticaloa town was bombed on 10 October. A body of a youth was found nearby with the head smashed. Thirty transformers have been damaged since April. The Electricity Board says Rs 2.2 million has been spent on repairs and another Rs 3.9 million is needed.

Cultivation and transport in the east have been badly affected by restrictions on fuel, particularly after the bombing of storage tanks in Colombo. Currently the Army allows 15 litres of diesel for every acre of land under cultivation. Although some fertiliser is permitted, urea can be used only within two kilometres of military camps. Refugees in some areas complain that they not receiving adequate assistance. Meeravodai refugees have been given only two weeks' dry rations.

EPDP MP S Sivathan said in Parliament on 24 October that dry rations were not issued to fishing families in Trincomalee District. Although 5,700 families had been identified as entitled by the District Secretary, only 2,600 families had been provisioned. A civilian was killed and three policemen injured in a LTTE landmine attack on 16 October at Thoppur, south of Trincomalee town. On 26 October a policeman was killed by the Tigers near a Trincomalee refugee camp.

slaughterhouse

OVER 120 Sinhalese villagers in border areas have been killed in five brutal Tiger attacks in ten days. A 300-strong LTTE women's brigade descended on four hamlets in Anuradhapura District on 26 October, hacking and shooting people as they slept. Before the carnage was complete, 36 people including women and children lay dead. Five days earlier in simultaneous attacks on three other villages - Boatta in Polonnaruwa District, Mangalagama in Amparai District and Padaviya in Mullaitivu District - the Tigers massacred 71 people. Reports say that a boy was beheaded and another had his arms chopped off. Ten Tamil villagers also died in the attack on Boatta. Kotiyagala village in Moneragala District was attacked on 23 October and 20 more Sinhalese were killed with the same brutality. The police recovered the bodies of 12 Sinhalese farmers in the Panama jungles on 25 October. They had all been hacked or shot. On 3 November, five children were allegedly killed near Batticaloa. The villages lie on the border of the North-East

Province, the area claimed by the Tamils as their homeland. The massacre of civilians is intended to divert the attention of the Army which is poised to enter Jaffna town. In late October, Polonnaruwa MP Rukman Senanayake demanded more security for the area from the government. Reports say over 5,000 Sinhalese villagers have fled from the east. LTTE's London spokesman Anton Rajah has denied Tiger involvement in the killings. Many observers believe that the attacks are aimed at provoking a backlash against the Tamils. In 1983, over 2,500 Tamils were killed in the south after 13 soldiers died in a LTTE attack. If a similar situation arises a major part of the Army may have to be redeployed. But in the short-term the Tiger killings have not had their desired effect. The fear of further massacres continue.

Muslims protest

ARMED with placards proclaiming "the North is our home also" representatives of 75,000 Muslims expelled from the north by LTTE ultimatum five years ago mounted a week of protest in Colombo in late October.

Demonstrators from the Northern Muslims Rights Organisation (NMRO) picketed the offices of the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR demanding they be recognised as refugees and resettled with UN assistance. Over 30,000 Muslim refugees have spent five years in squalid settlements in isolated Kalpitiya with little international assistance says NMRO leader Dr Hisbullah. Rehabilitation minister MHM Ashraff promises resettlement but progress has been slow. In

October 1990 the Tigers gave 70,000 Muslims 24 hours to leave the north with little more than the clothes on their backs in a bout of ethnic cleansing and organised plunder generating millions of rupees. Over 30,000 of the displaced Muslims are from Mannar Island which remains cut off by Tiger attacks and the withdrawal of the Kalpitiya ferry service in September. Food, fuel and medical supplies are increasingly scarce.

Police ran amok after a Tiger landmine explosion in Mannar on 26 October firing on a passenger bus, killing three civilians and injuring 17 others. Further west in Anuradhapura where 10,000 Muslims are refugees, 39 LTTE suspects were arrested on 17 October. Many are Muslims from Mannar and Vavuniya.

\$25 million fuel dumps destroyed in LTTE attack *Colombo braced for Tiger attacks*

COLOMBO is bracing itself for major attacks by Tiger suicide squads after the military's successful assault on Jaffna. As *Operation Sunray* gathered momentum, 20 LTTE guerrillas blew up Sri Lanka's major oil refinery and storage depots in two simultaneous attacks on the outskirts of Colombo on 20 October.

Over 20 soldiers were killed in a running battle as the guerrillas escaped. Some were shot when their soldiers panicked and fired on each other. Major security sweeps of the Tamil suburbs continued all night and four of the attack squad were arrested along with a Colombo Tamil businessman accused of masterminding the raid.

Over 40,000 tonnes of diesel and 15,000 tonnes of kerosene were destroyed along with 16 of 45 storage tanks worth in total around \$25 million which will hit Sri Lanka's war effort hard. A 48-hour fireball hung over the capital as firefighters from India with special equipment arrived to tackle the

blaze. Thousands of people fled their homes in panic before a three-day curfew was imposed.

As tension rose in the aftermath, three Tamil youths were tortured and beaten to death by angry mobs in Wanathamulla and Thotalanga. In Mattakuliya over 125 Tamil houses were raided and robbed by security personnel reportedly searching for LTTE suspects. Police refused to register resident's complaints.

Tamil M Selvakumar, 29, was beaten unconscious and his wife hospitalised after a mob attack. Their home was robbed of goods worth Rs 65,000 (\$1,300). Sureshkumar, 24, was dragged by a mob of 500 to a police station accusing him of being a Tiger. He was later released. T Wigneswaran was pushed down a flight of stairs by an angry crowd suffering head and leg injuries.

The situation was further polarised by a string of Tiger attacks on Sinhalese border villages killing over 120. LTTE is attempting to provoke an ethnic backlash

in the capital like July 1983 when over 2,000 Tamils died and 50,000 fled their homes in ten days of rioting.

Daily security sweeps of the capital continue as checkpoints and roadblocks multiply. Over 100 Tamils were arrested in Pettah in early October and another 80 in Maradana. Over 70 were detained. Police are targeting lodges and cheap hotels in both areas as well as Kotahena and Slave Island. A number of Tamil girls dressed as Muslims have been arrested which police say is the latest Tiger strategy. Over 1,000 Tamils were arrested after the oil refinery explosion and 67 detained. Police expect further Tiger attacks and arrests will continue.

Human rights groups are increasingly concerned over humanitarian safeguards for those arrested to prevent assault, extortion, torture or murder. Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) Chairman CT Jansz says over 600 people are currently detained illegally despite new security guidelines introduced in September.

the white list

REFUGEE agencies in the UK protested angrily after a leaked government briefing document revealed Britain would disqualify asylum applications from a "white list" of seven supposedly safe countries, including Sri Lanka, in a new Asylum and Immigration Bill to be introduced on 15 November.

Citing the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka, British Refugee Council chief executive Nick Hardwick said "The whole basis of asylum claims is that they are treated on their individual merits. We urge the government to reconsider, even at this late stage."

Over 200,000 Sri Lankan have claimed asylum in Europe in the last ten years, 25,000 of them in the UK. Country reports tabled at the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) meeting in Geneva in mid-October suggested up to 10,000 Sri Lankans would claim asylum in European countries in 1995.

Over 50 Sri Lankan illegal immigrants were rescued choking from an airless van between the Czech border and Dortmund, Germany on 26 September. as the trade in human cargo becomes increasingly cut-throat. They are likely to be deported. Tamils now pay criminal

networks in Colombo up to \$15,000 to smuggle them to Europe, sometimes with fatal results.

Many European countries seek to stem the refugee flow from Sri Lanka by deporting those who are refused asylum.

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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Switzerland has forcibly returned around 200 in the last two years and another 200 have gone underground or illegally fled to other European countries rather than be sent back to Colombo. Switzerland has over 30,000 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers and there are growing tensions between Tamil militant factions. PLOTE and LTTE supporters clashed in Zurich on 19 October and two PLOTE supporters suffered serious gunshot wounds.

Another 100 Tamils have been granted temporary humanitarian status in Denmark after three years in reception camps but European governments are increasingly unsympathetic to Tamil claims of persecution.

Over 3,000 Tamils demonstrated outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg in late October against continuing genocide in Sri Lanka, calling on the Colombo government to open negotiations with the LTTE.

In Canada, where there are over 80,000 Sri Lankan refugees and a powerful Tamil lobby, asylum-seeker Manivasagam Suresh, 40, a LTTE tax-collector was arrested for terrorist links on 20 October. If the courts validate his arrest, he will be deported.