

Jaffna falls

AFTER seven weeks of fighting between government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan national flag was raised over the city of Jaffna on 5 December.

NGOs estimate that 250,000 to 500,000 civilians have been displaced by the fighting, including over 170,000 people who have fled across the Jaffna lagoon to Kilinochchi where the Tigers have relocated their headquarters.

Over 20,000 troops advanced southward in two columns from Palaly airbase with heavy artillery and air cover in *Operation Sunray* which began on 17 October. Following the fall of Neerveli, 5km from Jaffna town, troops captured Urumpirai and Kopai North on 10 November in the face of monsoon rains and intense resistance from the Tigers.

The LTTE headquarters at Kondavil on Jaffna-Palaly road came under Army control on 14 November, the day on which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) decided to evacuate the Jaffna hospital and move to Point Pedro. Nallur, famed for its Kandasamy temple, fell six days later. Troops advanced on both flanks surrounding the town cutting off the only remaining outlet, the Jaffna-Kandy road leading to Chavakachcheri.

There was euphoria in Colombo as troops began the assault on Jaffna city centre on 21 November. Celebrations were planned when the Army indicated that the operation would be over by 26 November, the birthday of Tiger leader V Prabhakaran. But landmines and booby traps made progress difficult.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge declared on 23 November that the liberation of Jaffna would support the cause of peace and appealed to the people to celebrate without harming the Tamils. Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte was more blunt. Observers say his warning that revellers causing violence will be despatched promptly to the battlefield has had an effect.

The LTTE and the military have paid a heavy price for Jaffna town which is now almost empty. Around 450 soldiers

Chandrika has called on the Tigers to lay down arms offering amnesty to those who surrender. But a defiant Prabhakaran declared that LTTE has no choice but to continue resistance against military occupation.

have been killed and another 1,250 wounded. The Army claims that over 1,600 Tigers have died.

An Airforce cargo plane approaching Palaly was shot down by *Sea Tigers* on 18 November killing five crew members. Four days later, a transport plane with 63 soldiers on board plunged into the sea 10km north of Karaitivu.

The ferry crossing the Jaffna lagoon at Kilali has again been declared illegal by the government to block over 5,000 frightened civilians who flee the peninsula every day, but NGOs say the exodus will continue. Navy units captured a LTTE convoy after a firefight on the lagoon in late November.

In a nation-wide address after the fall of Jaffna, President Chandrika called on the Tigers to lay down arms offering amnesty to those who surrender. But a defiant Prabhakaran declared that LTTE has no choice but to continue resistance against military occupation. In late November the police offered a reward of Rs 30 million (\$600,000) for information on ten LTTE leaders including Mr Prabhakaran.

Holding Jaffna is a major problem for the government with LTTE targeting supply lines. In November a recruitment drive was launched to enrol 10,000 new soldiers. The Tigers in turn have called

on Tamil youths above the age of 14 to join.

As if to predict that the war will continue, Deputy Finance minister GL Peiris announced a massive Rs 38 billion (\$760 million) for defence when he tabled the 1996 budget in Parliament on 8 November. Observers say the budget has been designed for the Jaffna operation - tax cuts to keep the people quiet and a large chunk for defence to keep the Army happy.

The Sri Lankan government was outraged when the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali expressed concern for the displaced people in Jaffna calling for greater humanitarian assistance. In a letter to Mr Ghali, Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar asserted that comprehensive measures are in place for refugees with ICRC and NGO assistance. But a new decree says that all relief operations must be carried out through the government and no new agencies have been allowed in to the north.

President Chandrika's gamble seems to have hit new problems. She has won the appreciation of the Sinhalese electorate. But the fall of Jaffna, the heartland of Tamil culture has caused apprehension among the Tamils. The Tamil parties are concerned over the plight of the civilians and angered over the cancellation of a meeting with the President in mid-November. PA ally, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) voted against the government in Parliament on the defence budget in late November.

Chandrika is said to be determined to continue with plans for constitutional reforms devolving power to the regions and has rejected calls from hardliners in the government and military to pursue the military option and annihilate the LTTE. The main opposition United National Party (UNP) sees the raising of the separatist spectre and opposing devolution as the only way to remain in political contention. Observers say President Chandrika may now hold snap elections to increase the fragile People's Alliance majority in Parliament. The future of the north appears bleaker than ever after *Operation Sunray*.

THE NORTH

Exodus

OVER 200,000 destitute civilians have arrived at the northern mainland town of Kilinochchi since the LTTE ultimatum to evacuate Jaffna city in the face of advancing Sri Lankan troops in early November.

There is no immediate food crisis but growing fears over shortages of medicine and adequate shelter. Over half of the refugees are staying with friends and relatives rather than suffer the privations of temporary welfare centres in a growing circle of community halls and schools in outlying villages around Kilinochchi.

Some are from the peninsula's imperious upper castes, eager to return to Jaffna town. Others fear the growing LTTE propaganda and recruitment drive that conditions life in the new camps. Local NGOs fear those with friends and relatives will be excluded from official government figures for the displaced to cut back on food aid as the squeeze from Colombo continues.

Ministry officials deny food aid will be withheld to force Jaffna's outflow of civilians into government-controlled territory. Over 100 lorries loaded with rice, lentils, milk powder and kerosene left for Tiger-controlled areas north and west of Vavuniya in mid-November.

But the government regards the civilian exodus as an artificial creation of the LTTE for its own military advantage and has no intention of provisioning the Tigers' relocation to the Vanni.

Lorries will no longer cross the

Vavuniya checkpoint, being unloaded and then reloaded on other trucks on the other side, infinitely slowing down the process. There are bureaucratic delays at Trincomalee as ICRC food-aid ships wait to sail for Point Pedro.

The ICRC and international aid agencies withdrew to Point Pedro in the north-east corner of the peninsula in mid-November as the Tigers closed in on Jaffna town. A second LTTE ultimatum to evacuate the peninsula by 26 November Tiger leader Prabhakaran's birthday passed uneasily with over 200,000 people still trapped in the Point Pedro area.

Further south at Kilali the last major crossing point south on the Jaffna lagoon up to 5,000 people a day continue to flee to the mainland. The surrounding area is open country with little shelter and NGOs are struggling to help the thousands who wait in the mud and monsoon rains to escape. As few as 50,000 people remain at Chavakachcheri the epicentre of the first outflow and the threat of major epidemic has been averted. But hundreds are suffering from diarrhoea and respiratory infections that come with the monsoon.

For the few hundred who escape south to Vavuniya there are growing signs that the military will prevent a new Tamil influx on Colombo. Most are held for three days while papers are checked and only those whose relatives vouch for them can travel on to the capital.

Floods

Over 25,000 people including many Muslim refugees have been badly hit by heavy flooding which ravaged Puttalam and Chilaw Districts north of Colombo in early November.

Arrested

Two Catholic priests working for the church's HUDEC development agency were arrested at the military checkpoint to the north at Thandikulam on 9 November, with contraband and over Rs 1 million (\$200,000) concealed in their luggage.

Protests

Over 25,000 exiled Tamils took part in major demonstrations in London, Paris and Toronto on 18 November calling for urgent relief for 500,000 displaced Tamils and international recognition for a separate Tamil homeland.

Targets

After the Tigers abducted and killed a policeman on isolated Mannar island on 22 November, LTTE leaflets appeared warning people that buses with security personnel on board were targets.

Killed

Former principal of Manipay Hindu Ladies College Mrs Pasupathipillai was shot dead by the LTTE when she refused to vacate her Jaffna home in early November. Reports say her husband was killed by the Tigers five years ago for links with the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

NGOs under fire

RELIEF agencies came under attack from the Sri Lankan government after United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali issued an international appeal to address the mass displacement of Jaffna civilians in early November.

A few days later, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshamm Kadirgamar announced that no outside organisations including the UN would be permitted independent aid operations because of perceptions of lack of impartiality. NGOs could channel relief materials and funds through government agencies said Mr Kadirgamar.

Jaffna Government Agent K Ponnambalam was promptly suspended for releasing exaggerated and distorted

figures of the Jaffna displaced - around 500,000 which is what most relief agencies on the ground say to be the case.

The government clearly fears LTTE attempts to internationalise the Jaffna exodus and will keep a tight rein on the aid sector until the military position becomes clear. "We will not let the Tigers off the hook again", said one retired soldier echoing Colombo's military hierarchy.

The clash inspired a new diatribe against the UN and NGO sectors in the Colombo press. French medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) was accused of exploiting the war after a fundraising appeal for the 500,000 displaced in Jaffna appeared in a Hong Kong newspaper.

A conference in Bentota south of Colombo sponsored by the NGO Forum on Sri Lanka a campaigning alliance of national and international NGOs was picketed by 3,000 demonstrators in mid-November and a number of delegates received minor injuries.

An open letter to the government from NGOs working in the north issued before the UN appeal but subsequently given attention by the Sri Lankan press reaffirmed the reality of the current displacement and offered their resources to work with the government on a joint assessment and relief effort.

There are private signals on the government side of a more measured approach but much will depend on the military.

■ Cycle bomb kills civilians in Amparai

Storm in the east

THIRTY EIGHT soldiers were killed and 24 others injured when the LTTE attacked an Army patrol at Santhiveli, 9km south of Valaichenai on 19 November. The Defence Ministry says over 50 Tigers were killed in the clash.

Following the attack, soldiers ran amok shooting dead J Lakshmi, S Nagammah and R Mayilan and seriously wounding eight other civilians. Many houses were burned and over 150 people fled the area.

The LTTE continued to keep up the pressure in the east where soldiers have been withdrawn and military camps closed to boost the Jaffna offensive. Fuel tanks near the Batticaloa railway station were blasted by the Tigers on 4

November. Twelve soldiers died and three others injured in a LTTE attack on an Army patrol between Welikanda and Valaichenai on 6 November. Five days later eight Special Task Force personnel died in an ambush at Vellaveli. The Vellaveli police station was also attacked injuring a policeman and a civilian.

An Army foot patrol came under LTTE fire in Vantharumoolai on 14 November. Two soldiers were killed. In another attack on 24 November, the Tigers killed 11 soldiers and injured five at Punanai south of Welikanda.

Following reports of LTTE infiltration, the security forces carried out major search operations in the east. Police hunting Tigers destroyed a 32 acre opium

plantation in Nilgala jungle south-west of Amparai. Over 300 soldiers combed the Yala National Park for several days in mid-November. On 18 November people in Batticaloa town were ordered to stay indoors and a house-to-house search was conducted. Several people were taken into custody.

A youth was shot dead by police on 26 November at Vinayagapuram. Parents say he was a civilian working at the Valaichenai market and refused to sign a statement that he was an LTTE member. The body of T Ariyaratnam who went missing while working in the fields was found at Vantharumoolai on 1 December. The following day the body of S Sothinathan, was found tied to a lamp post in Iyankerni.

Further south in Amparai two people were killed and 37 injured by a cycle bomb on 5 November. The military carried out several search operations in the area. On 14 November 27 Tamils were arrested.

Reports from Trincomalee say that Tamils fear to go out because of continuing search operations and arrests. Following the arrest of Government Technical College student Velum Mayilum Jayaseelan on 10 November, other students boycotted lectures in protest. Jayaseelan was later released.

TELO member Devadas Visvadas was shot dead allegedly by the LTTE at Uvarmalai on 11 November. The Tigers attacked an Army patrol at Palampattaru on 26 November injuring two soldiers.

assassins

OVER 16 people were killed and another 52 injured after two *Black Tiger* suicide bombers staged an abortive attack on Army headquarters in Colombo on 11 November. hundreds of Tamils were arrested in the aftermath of the explosion and the capital reains tense. Plans to "celebrate" the military victory in the north have touched off new fears of anti-Tamil riots.

Security forces believe that there are hundreds of tiger suicide cadre in Colombo, hidden among 150,000 northern refugees, waiting to be assigned high-profile targets. Police moved to close 22 of the 700 cheap hotels and lodges in the city used by displaced Tamils, claiming they were the Colombo bases of several Tiger hit squads. Arms and ammunition were recovered and among those arrested was a Tiger assassin planning to kill President Chandrika, police said.

Another 80 Tamil youths were arrested in the Fort area in early November and there are new investigations of Tamil businessmen suspected of being Tiger bankers.

Sri Lanka's top policemen IGP Rajaguru said he would not permit the Tigers to make Colombo a "little Jaffna" as fears of an ethnic backlash grew among the city's 350,000 Tamil population. ten days after the bombing, Colombo police chief Kottagadeniya was transferred to a reserve unit after protests from Tamil political parties over mass indiscriminate arrests of Tamils and allegations of extortion and torture by police.

A government directive reminded Colombo's one million inhabitants that Emergency Regulations reissued in September required all householders to register friends or relatives staying in their homes with the police. Many Tamils do not, fearing intimidation or extortion. As the Tiger threat to the capital grows, so will the police crack-down on the Tamil community.

After the fall

AKILA, leader of the LTTE's Women's Wing was among hundreds of female fighters killed in the fall of Jaffna.

As they withdrew, the Tigers left a string of complex booby-traps including a chain of explosions centred on 19 houses which killed and injured an unknown number of soldiers.

The Tigers have also stripped middle class homes in Jaffna of electrical goods and consumer durables which has angered the thousands of displaced. LTTE are also doing a roaring trade in buying gold at cut-price rates as people gamble their families' futures against short-term survival.

There are still no accurate reports of civilian fatalities from the fall of Jaffna in the absence of the international press

and continuing rigid military censorship. Hundreds may have died. In one incident, Sri Lankan aircraft bombed Karaveddy on 26 November, killing four civilians including an eight year-old child and an old woman.

Aerial bombing and shelling of the Thenmaratchi area where thousands wait to cross Jaffna lagoon has continued. Over 3,000 people in Thenmaratchi are suffering from monsoon influenza and there are 300 cases of cerebral malaria.

The Tigers will now rebuild their administration in Kilinochchi but the government will tighten the screw. Colombo now plans to suspend the salaries of all government servants in the north saying they are under LTTE control. Other measures are sure to follow.

Arrests and detention of Tamils in the south continue

Wave of fear

TAMILS are concerned that they face a new round of harassment as arrests and detention continue in southern Sri Lanka.

Over 150 people were taken into custody in Kandapola in Nuwara Eliya District. Workers on estates say that they were asked questions such as whether they had marriage connections or any other links in the north-east. In another operation in Nuwara Eliya town on 14 November another 150 were arrested.

A number of other plantation youths working in Colombo were detained when they came home for the Hindu Deepavali festival in November. Many youths who work in Colombo are not returning for fear of arrests.

At Mawathura in Gampola District 32 Plantation Tamils attending a birthday party were detained. The Gampola District Court fixed bail for each person at Rs 4,500. In Kandy the courts allowed bail at Rs 5,000 each for 20 Tamils arrested in the town on 15 November. Four days later 19 were held in Hatton.

Eight Tamil youths who were held for 12 days in Kalutara were released without charge, but the magistrate ordered them to pay Rs 250 as state costs.

Police say those without identity cards are arrested and most released after investigation. According to Upcountry People's Front Vice President VT Dharmalingam over 60% of the Plantation workers have not been issued identity cards. AP Kanapathipillai of Lawyers for Human Rights and Development says that arrests are taking place even after producing identity documents. There are also complaints that estate superintendents are not taking adequate measures to protect the workers under their charge.

Reports from Nuwara Eliya say that Tamils are reluctant to go to the government hospital for fear of being accused of LTTE links. At Welipane in Matugama a Tamil youth who went to the hospital to be treated for fever was handed over to the police. President of the Hill Country

Teachers Association M Nesamani says in a letter to President Chandrika that students and teachers fear to attend classes.

People are also afraid to go to temples after arrests of priests. A Hindu priest and his wife who came from Jaffna to attend a temple festival in Deniyaya were arrested. Soldiers desecrated the Kotahena temple in mid-November by entering the inner sanctum and forcing the removal of the sacred *poonool* worn by three arrested Hindu priests.

A large number of arrests have also taken place in Colombo. Often parents or relatives are not informed of arrests. K Selvarajah who was arrested in Maradana in Colombo on 20 October was found by parents to be held at Ragama police station in mid-November.

Observers say the government must take strong measures to end the harassment of the Tamils living in the south. But many are doubtful whether such information reaches the ear of a security-conscious President.

Tamil Nadu parties protest

THE entire southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu came to a standstill when political parties staged a *hartal* or general strike on 30 November calling for an end to the war in northern Sri Lanka. Most parties took part, including the Chief Minister Jayalalitha's ruling AIADMK. Support for the strike was also seen in neighbouring Pondichery.

Since the beginning of *Operation Sunray* in Jaffna, Tamil Nadu political parties have been demanding the Indian government to intervene. M Karunanidhi's DMK staged a black-flag rally in Madras on 2 November which was followed by a fast by the breakaway MDMK led by LTTE's ardent supporter V Gopalasamy.

While DMK MPs met Indian President Shanker Dayal Sharma to express concern, Mr Gopalasamy and Dr S Ramdoss of the PMK accused the Indian government of secretly helping Sri Lanka. In a show of dubious solidarity Ms Jayalalitha wrote to Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao saying that India should take note of human rights implications arising from indiscriminate attacks on civilians. In mid-November S Thirunavukarasu's MGRADMK stage a

protest in front of the Sri Lankan High Commission in Madras.

The Sri Lankan issues was raised in both houses of the Indian Parliament. MPs urged some kind action to protect civilians caught up in the war. All

attempts by the Tamil Nadu parties failed to persuade the Indian government. Prime Minister Rao, who faces general elections next year, told Ghanian MPs on a visit to Africa in mid-November that India opposed the division of the island.

The Indian government is aware that the Jaffna offensive and the demonstrations had not created widespread anger and concern among the public in Tamil Nadu as in July 1983 when anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka claimed over 2,500 lives. Observers say the gun culture introduced by Tamil militant groups and the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu are the main reasons for the loss of sympathy for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause in the state.

During and after the 1983 violence thousands of refugees fled to India. Surprisingly no refugee reached Tamil Nadu shores from Jaffna following *Operation Sunray*. Indian officers say naval vigilance may have prevented refugees crossing the narrow Palk Strait. There are still 60,000 Sri Lankan refugees in camps in Tamil Nadu and suffer unjust conditions imposed by the state government.

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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