

Army advances on Kilinochchi

Over 200,000 frightened Tamil civilians fled the northern town of Kilinochchi, headquarters of the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in the face of a major offensive by Sri Lankan forces on 26 July.

After a week of artillery shelling and aerial bombing, troops supported by helicopter gunships pushed south from Elephant Pass to Paranthan, six km north of Kilinochchi, meeting stiff resistance from Tiger fighters. Kilinochchi became the LTTE's capital-in-exile after they forcibly evacuated over 250,000 civilians south of the lagoon last December when the military captured Jaffna town.

Twice displaced in eight months, thousands have fled into jungle areas south of the town and international relief agencies say the terrain and continuing air strikes make it difficult to survey their whereabouts and safety. Bombing raids have continued on Iranaimadu and Mankulam and the LTTE says seven civilians were killed and six badly injured in an air attack on 24 July at Mallavi, west of Mankulam where the Tigers have regrouped.

There are three major concentrations of refugees say initial estimates: at Mallavi, another at Akkarayankulam where Kilinochchi's civil administration has relocated and a third at Mankulam on the main route south to government-controlled Vavuniya.

Authorities in Vavuniya are preparing for a massive refugee influx, requisitioning community halls and schools but the Tigers are unlikely to surrender control of their civilian power base, and the Mankulam road remains quiet. Only a few hundred civilians have arrived at Madhu, Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic

Tigers kill 1,400 at Mullaitivu

shrine 60 km west of Vavuniya where there is a United Nations refugee camp capable of holding 30,000. The fear of day-time air strikes as the siege of Kilinochchi continues and tight Tiger control has trapped 200,000 people in the open without adequate food, water or shelter.

The Tigers in turn say the government is using food aid as a weapon of war, blocking all relief convoys to the LTTE-controlled Vanni areas north of Vavuniya since the 17th July. Over 120 food lorries are lined up outside the town and the LTTE says 40 drivers were badly beaten by soldiers when they attempted to take a convoy north with official permission.

Unlike many other civil wars, the Sri Lankan government has continued to send food aid across the front line as part of its "hearts and minds" strategy fuelling increasing military frustration. "We are feeding the Tigers then fighting them", thundered Colombo's top brass as the LTTE routinely plundered or taxed government supplies through its parallel administration in the north.

Having forced the Tigers out of Jaffna the Army may seek to starve them into submission, threatening thousands of civilians trapped between the two forces.

What will further harden military hearts is a devastating attack by Tiger guerrillas in mid July on an isolated Army camp at Mullaitivu, 175 miles north-west of Colombo in the biggest battle of the 13-year civil war.

Over 1,400 Sri Lankan soldiers died in a ten-day battle as thousands of LTTE guerrillas overran the camp, capturing huge stocks of arms and ammunition.

One of only 40 soldiers who survived told the *London Times* how the Tigers attacked in human waves

while mortar shells rained down. Many soldiers who were wounded bled to death said Private WG Dammike, aged 19. When an Army relief column broke through in late July the base was flattened and stripped bare. Grim faced officials from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it appeared the Tigers had taken no prisoners.

The Mullaitivu attack has badly jolted Colombo and the Chandrika Kumaratunge government shattering post-Jaffna propaganda that the Tigers were a spent force. Hundreds of anxious parents jammed military headquarters telephone lines seeking news of missing sons while Colombo newspapers fulminated over the government's inept censorship strategy, claiming that world press attention meant everyone else knew how many died at Mullaitivu except Sri Lankan citizens.

The government has stayed tight-lipped over final casualty figures. As the Kilinochchi advance gathered pace Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told the BBC that the LTTE was a separatist organisation which did not want peace and there was no alternative but to make war on them.

One theory currently circulating is the Mullaitivu attack was a pre-emptive strike by the Tigers to prevent a pincer advance on Kilinochchi, from north and east. Its success will further destabilise sea routes to the Jaffna peninsula and threaten food supplies and rehabilitation of the shattered peninsula.

The Army's thrust on Kilinochchi opens up the dangerous promise of a land route to Vavuniya, 70 km south, symbolically reuniting the country and banishing the Tigers to the jungles. But with 10,000 cadre under arms that is where the LTTE is most dangerous and a land corridor may cost thousands of lives, civilian and military as the stakes rise in this forgotten war.

Over 60 people were killed and 450 injured when two bombs exploded in a packed commuter train in the suburbs of Colombo on 24 July. Authorities blamed the LTTE. Hours after the 13th anniversary of ethnic riots which killed hundreds of Tamils in 1983, President Chandrika appealed for calm in a nationwide TV address. A full report on page four.

JAFFNA

Sliding out of control

AT LEAST 20 people were killed and 60 injured when a female Tamil suicide bomber detonated explosives strapped to her waist as a visiting government minister's motorcade stopped on Stanley Road in Jaffna town on 4 July.

Eleven of the minister's motorcade died including Jaffna military commander Brigadier Ananda Hamangoda. Some civilians were killed or injured in cross-fire when the military panicked after the explosion, say local sources. The Tigers' target, Housing and Construction minister Nimal Siripala de Silva escaped with minor injuries.

The attack highlights the military's fragile footing on the peninsula and the Tigers' ability to penetrate at will. Army control outside a central belt between the KKS and Point Pedro roads remains uncertain. Much of the west around Manipay and the east beyond Chavakachcheri is either Tiger-controlled or contested territory. An eight-foot-high earth and rubble wall between Puthur and Chavakachcheri marks an unofficial *Maginot* line.

Such defences are little use against an unseen enemy. A landmine blast killed four soldiers and injured seven on 9 July as they transported school exam papers. Five days later 13 soldiers died in a dawn assault on a bunker position at Sarasalai. Ten more soldiers died in an ambush near Chavakachcheri in late July.

Civilians are brutally reminded of the Tigers' invisible control. Former Asst.

Government Agent (AGA) Thambu Ramalingam was shot dead by two youths in school uniform at his house on 6 July. Mr Ramalingam took part in official ceremonies in December restoring Jaffna to government control and had received death threats.

Mrs. Sarojayogini was shot dead in the street returning from the temple on 19 July. A note by her body said she betrayed the Tigers. A cowed local community stayed away from her funeral.

The hearts and minds honeymoon is over. After the Stanley Road suicide bombing, the civilian killings and the Tigers' Mullaitivu triumph, troops are trigger-happy and security checkpoints increasingly tense. Large-scale cordon-and-search operations began in Navatkuli and Thirunelveli in mid-July and a number of youths arrested. The LTTE claims Selvam, 28, a fish trader was tortured and killed at Nunavil Army camp in late July.

What Jaffna Tamils want most - peace and a return to normal life - is sliding out of control. Food and medicine remain in short supply with rice at Rs 90 a kilo, and there are long queues for dry rations. Apart from minor road repairs and chlorinating some wells, no reconstruction has begun and no funds provided by the government says Jaffna's senior civil administrator Government Agent C. Pathmanathan. A new bout of Jaffna's bitter civil war has begun and the Tigers have won the first round.

Black Tigers

Celebrating Black Tiger day on the 5 July, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran described the guerrillas' suicide squads as men and women of flame who destroy the enemy armed strength by their mental strength, in an address on the LTTE radio.

Sea battle

The Sri Lankan Navy killed 15 LTTE cadre in two boats off Puttalam on 10 July as Tiger incursions continue on the West coast. Two soldiers died in a Tiger raid on a fishing village nearby.

Legacy

Relatives of 35 Sinhalese schoolboys murdered during the JVP insurrection in Embilipitiya in 1989 say eight soldiers accused of involvement in their deaths remain on active duty in the area.

Abductions

Suspected LTTE guerrillas abducted nine tourists and four fishermen in the remote Yala National Park area of the south-east coast in mid July. The tourists were later released. The Park has been temporarily closed and Army search operations are said to be underway.

Conscription

Sri Lanka may introduce compulsory military service warned Deputy Home Affairs Minister Lakshman Kiriella after a recruitment drive for 10,000 soldiers produced only 1,800 applicants.

bloodbath at Mullaitivu

OVER 1,400 Sri Lankan soldiers are dead or missing after the Tigers overran an isolated Army camp at Mullaitivu, 175 miles north-east of Colombo on 17 July, in the biggest battle of the 13-year civil war.

Fewer than 40 soldiers survived the Operation *Oyatha Alaigal* (Endless Waves) as thousands of guerrillas reduced the 4 km camp to rubble in a ten-day battle. Survivors told how the LTTE removed tractor-loads of arms and ammunition, worth an estimated \$20 million including two 122 MM artillery pieces and 1,000 shells.

Military rescue attempts were hampered by Mullaitivu's isolated position surrounded by miles of Tiger-controlled

jungles. Over 40 soldiers died when a Tiger suicide squad sank a Navy patrol boat on 19 July as Sri Lankan troops battled to secure a beachhead near the beleaguered base. Another 22 of the elite Special Forces were killed in a mortar strike on a landing craft. The Tigers admit to over 290 cadre killed.

Ten days later government forces finally regained control but there was little left of the base and it has been abandoned. Deputy Defence Minister Gen. Ratwatte's absence at a parliamentary debate on the debacle incensed government and opposition MPs alike while press censorship kept casualty figures out of the papers and the country in the dark say angry politicians.

In truth, Mullaitivu was a disaster waiting to happen, a vulnerable outpost miles beyond the military's Forward Defence Line. The Tigers' withdrawal from Jaffna may have lulled government strategists into a false sense of security instead of realising it freed thousands of Tiger cadre for other targets. Operation *Endless Waves* as its name suggests defied conventional Western military wisdom with a cold-blooded "human wave" offensive.

Mullaitivu's destruction allows LTTE leader Prabhakaran to protect his headquarters Base 1-4 in a new phase of Vanni jungle fighting and to threaten major food supplies to Jaffna with a new *Sea Tiger* base a few miles north of the camp's smouldering ruins.

■ *The east is red and yellow*

Year zero west of lagoon

OVER 2,000 civilians fled to Valaichenai in early July as Sri Lankan troops launched a major offensive on Tiger-controlled Vaharai, north of the Polonnaruwa road on the eastern coastal strip.

Army units overran five LTTE camps and secured control of the town. The Tigers say six civilians were shot dead during the operation. Government sources declined to say whether troops would hold the remote area or withdraw.

Troops withdrew from Vaharai and most of the area west of Batticaloa lagoon in 1994 leaving a fragile ribbon of coastal road in their control from Valaichenai through Batticaloa to Amparai. The Kumaratunge government

gambled heavily taking troops north for the Jaffna offensive and the east is increasingly vulnerable.

Journalists travelling west of Batticaloa lagoon say Tiger presence is all pervasive with new LTTE cemeteries established in many places for martyred cadre as a theatrical symbol of their dominance. Twenty-foot hoardings of martyred heroes look down on dusty village roads and the red-and-yellow Tiger flag is everywhere. Local LTTE officials have ignored Colombo's change of time zone in May leaving the region one hour behind the rest of the country. In late July, the Tigers setup their own police force led by former Chavakachcheri police chief Krishnakumar. The region's

rich rice lands make it a potential stronghold though the landscape is currently racked by drought.

On the contested coastal strip, the Army rules by day, the Tigers by night. Casual killings proliferate. Udayakumar, brother of ruling SLFP Batticaloa organiser Ganeshamoorthy was shot dead at Kaluwanchikudy on 6 July. A day earlier TULF MP Selvarajah escaped unhurt in an attack on his home. One person was killed and several injured. Both attacks were attributed to the Tigers. Tamil widow Arulammah, 33, was shot dead on 10 July at night when gunmen called her out of her house at Valaichenai.

The Tigers keep the Polonnaruwa road, the only real link to the rest of the country, under constant pressure. Seven police were killed and 11 injured in an attack on Sungavil near Polonnaruwa in late July. Another three soldiers were killed and eight injured in a confrontation at Welikande. One civilian also died in crossfire.

Further north in troubled Trincomalee district there are continuing signals of the Tigers' military capability. Over 30 soldiers were killed in a LTTE ambush at remote Meegasodella on 1 July. Tiger casualties are unknown. Two soldiers died in a landmine ambush at Pulmoddai north of Trincomalee town in late July.

Sinhalese villagers in Seruwila say over nine schools have closed after the military withdrew from villages south of Trincomalee bay leaving them increasingly vulnerable.

UNP veto

AS was widely predicted, the opposition United National Party (UNP) has formally rejected the ruling People's Alliance (PA) devolution package as threatening the territorial integrity of the country in a meeting with five Tamil parties on 3 July. UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe has ruled out further discussions with President Chandrika but UNP will continue to attend the Parliamentary Select Committee framing the proposals. The rejection ends a year-long cat-and-mouse game as the opposition watched Sinhala hard-line opposition to a federal solution gather momentum after the government released draft proposals in August 1995. But Tamil MPs say President Chandrika's confrontational style of politics has alienated UNP support, essential for the required two-thirds majority in Parliament. Veteran Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranaike issued a personal appeal for popular support for the package, stressing the government would never allow any division of the country. The Tamil parties in turn, called for a new PA-UNP consensus and urged the government

to remain firm on current devolution plans. Justice minister GL Peiris wants Tamil intellectuals to go to Jaffna and sell the government's proposals to the people but there are no takers. New plans to send 10,000 volunteers from the government's Samurddhi development movement to rebuild Jaffna and beat the Tiger threat have angered Tamil politicians. Disillusion is growing in the government's fragile ruling coalition and Tamil parties such as PLOTE and EPDP are openly threatening to withdraw support. The Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) a conspicuous government ally wants the Tamil parties to drop the demand for a merged North-East to facilitate two regional councils and prevent the east's 30% Tamil-speaking Muslim population being outvoted by Jaffna in any regional administration. But the ballot box has never seemed so far away.

Cash crisis

SRI LANKA is reeling from a new bout of *stagflation* - rising inflation and falling growth - say analysts warning of economic crisis ahead.

This year's war budget has doubled to around Rs 46 billion (\$920 million) and the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) warns that drought and war will cut Sri Lanka's rice crop in 1996 by 25%. The government was forced to raise bread and flour prices in late July, generating wide discontent.

Economists point to the increasing tempo of the war and the slow pace of privatisation compounded by continuing high interest rates which makes Sri Lankan business uncompetitive in an increasingly global market. Present lending rates in Singapore are 6.3% and in Sri

Lanka 17.2%.

The government appears powerless to lower interest rates because of the high treasury bond rates floated to bridge previous budget deficits and the same short-sighted strategy is likely to prevail.

This year's budget was expected to realise \$400 million in privatising the management of the troubled plantation sector and its key export tea. Only \$15 million has accrued and strikes and union opposition continue.

After a year of labour unrest President Kumaratunge has postponed a new Workers' Charter fearing that it will deter foreign investment. But more radical surgery may be required. Colombo's infant stock market is in free fall and tourism has slumped badly.

Tigers' terror strike seeks ethnic backlash

Colombo train bomb kills 62

AT LEAST 62 people were killed and 450 injured when two bombs exploded in a packed commuter train in the suburbs of Colombo on the 24th July.

Two compartments of the evening rush-hour Aluthgama train were blown apart after railway officials stopped the train at Wellawatte to unload a suspect package. Authorities blamed the LTTE who denied the bombing.

The explosion came 24 hours after the 13th anniversary of Black July when a Tiger ambush in Jaffna sparked a frenzy of government-inspired ethnic riots in Colombo and the south in 1983 that left hundreds of Tamils dead and 50,000 displaced.

In a nationwide TV address, President Chandrika Kumaratunge appealed for calm, saying there must be no backlash against the capital's 350,000 Tamil community. Veteran journalist Lucien Rajakarunanayake told the BBC there was some looting and burning of Tamil shops in the Dehiwala suburbs but the situation was under control. Over 40 sus-

pects have been arrested and the capital remains tense and volatile. "Sightings" of three suicide bombers in Nugegoda, Kohuwala and Kollupitiya the next day touched off a city-wide panic that prompted 200 arrests. Another 250 Tamils were arrested as major security sweeps continued in late July.

To recreate an ethnic backlash against Colombo's Tamils through its suicide bomb attacks is a key Tiger strategy. Refugees from the north-east war are especially vulnerable since security chiefs believe the Tigers have secreted hundreds of undercover assassins among the 150,000 Tamils who have fled to Colombo.

Everyday around 200 Tamils are detained by security sweeps in the capital while their identities are checked. While most are released within 72 hours, one or two may fall into the hands of corrupt police officers who want to extort a bribe or torture a "confession" from them.

Tamil parties regularly protest over all treatment after arrest and TULF MP

Joseph Pararajasingham is calling for Tamil-speaking officers in all Colombo police stations after frequent harassment of north-east Tamils who have to register with the capital's police on arrival.

Justice secretary Dhara Wijayatilleke promised speedy action to try Tamil detainees after a hunger strike by 400 prisoners last month. Around 1,500 Tamils are said to be in custody, some held for four years without trial.

But the LTTE threat to Colombo remains all too real. Police recovered over 100 kgs of high explosives from three safe houses in Wellawatte, 12 days before the train bomb when a Tamil youth was arrested at a city road block. Another weapons haul was uncovered in a Tamil shop in Kotahena in early July.

Police detained Rasalingam Menaka, 19, at Nuwara Eliya bus station on 17th July alleging that she laid plans to blow up Navy headquarters when she stayed at three Colombo lodges. Another 38 north-east Tamils were arrested in the Hill Country capital, Kandy, in late July.

LTTE international

IN the wake of the Dehiwala train bombing, there is renewed pressure on the Sri Lankan government to ban the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. India proscribed the Tigers after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991, and renewed the ban last month.

Sri Lankan politicians are split on the move, some saying it will block potential peace moves while others believe it will spearhead a crackdown on the Tigers' ever-growing global network. The five Tamil political parties oppose the ban saying the Tigers are already too powerful and well organised internationally. Rauf Hakeem of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress says the Tigers must be defeated militarily and to ban them will only drive the movement further underground.

Sri Lankan Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has frequently called on Western countries to proscribe the LTTE. The diplomatic response has been that it is difficult to do so while the Tigers are not banned in Sri Lanka.

To the Sri Lankan press this is "anti-terrorist hypocrisy" as a blistering *Island* editorial dismissed the 40-point package, agreed at a global summit to combat ter-

rorism in Lyons in late July. If groups like the Tigers are not banned says the *Island*, then terrorism will flourish through the generous doles paid out to sympathizers granted asylum status.

Three days earlier, Colombo newspa-

pers reprinted an *Asia Week* article headlined "LTTE international" which details the Tigers arms-buying network across Asia and claims its \$2 million a month income comes from taxing the Tamil refugee community in Western countries.

Fundraising takes various forms says *Asia Week*, including extortion, threatening relatives who remain back home in Tiger-controlled areas. But hard evidence implicating the Tigers in the international drugs trade is lacking says the article.

A second series of articles reprinted from *McLean's* magazine highlights growing LTTE dominance of Canada's 120,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and claims over 10,000 Tamil guerrillas have entered Canada under false pretences - claiming they are refugees fleeing persecution.

Two Tamil gangs vying for control of lucrative drugs and arms markets fought a pitched battle leaving three wounded in late July in Scarborough which now has over 35,000 Tamil residents.

Canadian police are investigating key Tiger suspects but as Colombo's Tamil political parties imply, it may be too little or too late.

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

The Sri Lanka Project
The British Refugee Council
3 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (0171) 582 6922
Fax: (0171) 582 9929
E-mail: refcounciluk@gn.apc.org
Web: <http://www.gn.apc.org/refugeecouncil>

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