

EU calls for full UN access to Lankan war zone

Brussels calls for independent probe into conflict

AFP, Brussels

The European Commission yesterday called for the United Nations to be given full access to the conflict zone in northern Sri Lanka where the government was routing the Tamil Tiger rebels.

The EU also called for an independent enquiry into alleged human rights violations during the conflict between government troops and Tamil Tiger rebels in northern Sri Lanka.

EU foreign ministers, in an agreed statement, said the European Union was 'appalled by the loss of innocent civilian lives as a result of the conflict and by the high numbers of casualties, including children.'

The 27-nation bloc called on the Sri Lankan government and all other involved parties 'to urgently proceed towards a comprehensive political process.'

The statement, issued as EU foreign ministers held talks in Brussels, stressed the need for both sides 'to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.'

The European Union 'calls for the alleged violations of these laws to be investigated through an independent inquiry. Those accountable must be brought to justice,' the statement added.

'I'm very relieved that at least it seems that the heaviest fighting is over. At the same time the situation of the civilians is still very difficult and fragile,' said EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, as she arrived for talks with European foreign ministers in Brussels.

'We know there are still people in the war zone and many have come out. What is very important now is that the UN can have full access there,' she added.

The Sri Lankan military announced

Monday that the government was in control of the whole of the country, after mopping up the last pockets of resistance among the Tamil fighters.

The conflict has left more than 70,000 dead from pitched battles, suicide attacks, bomb strikes and assassinations. The LTTE Tamil Tigers emerged in the 1970s, with all-out war breaking out in the early 1980s.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, whose country will assume the rotating EU presidency in July, said that 'there must be immediate access for international humanitarian organisations, the UN organisations and the International Committee of the Red Cross because tens of thousands of people are really in desperate need of help.'

Last month the Sri Lankan authorities refused to issue a visa for Bildt, who had been hoping to join his British and French counterparts on a visit there.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankans wave the national flag as they celebrate their country's military victory over Tamil Tigers in Colombo yesterday after the death of LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran.



PHOTO: AFP

This undated photograph released by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence (MOD) on May 13, 2009 reportedly taken from a recovered family photo album of Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran shows the Tiger leader (C) with his wife Mathiyathani (2nd R), his son Charles Anthony (R) and unidentified relatives at an undisclosed location.

Tamils in vigil outside Geneva UN HQ

AFP, Geneva

Shocked Tamils mounted a vigil outside the United Nations headquarters in Geneva yesterday urging international action to help their minority after Sri Lanka declared a final victory over Tiger rebels.

About 100 protesters have been in place since late Sunday night, an AFP correspondent saw, with organisers claiming thousands of sympathisers are expected to descend on the site over the course of the afternoon.

'Stop killing Tamils right now,' said one placard, while another read 'it is better to have two countries at peace than one at war.'

'As we speak, civilians are dying' in Sri Lanka, said protester Tharan Deivendran.

'We will remain here until (the international community) finds a solution' for injured and displaced civilians, added Mahatrujan Mahaveenthan.

LTTE once seemed invincible

AFP, Colombo

The final defeat of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers has brought an end to one of the world's most brutal ethnic conflicts and the demise of one of its most formidable and disciplined rebel outfits.

Just two years ago, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) appeared indestructible, controlling a large swathe of territory in the north and east of the island with all the trappings of a separate state.

Formed by Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Tigers spent more than 30 years confounding expectations of their military defeat, but a sustained offensive by government troops saw them cornered, broken and finally vanquished.

An 11th-hour rebel offer to lay down their weapons went unheeded as the Sri Lankan military ordered a last assault that wiped out the entire LTTE

leadership, including Prabhakaran, and 200 plus diehard fighters guarding them.

The death of Prabhakaran, who was shot while trying to flee in an ambulance, would appear to scupper any short-term possibility of the LTTE re-emerging as a depleted guerrilla force.

In the fight for a separate Tamil homeland, Prabhakaran, 54, had refined the use of suicide bombers who carried out deadly attacks against high-profile targets, including spectacular strikes against economic installations.

Former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a female Tiger suicide bomber in 1991, in retaliation for sending Indian peacekeepers to Sri Lanka in 1987, who ended up fighting the rebels.

The Tigers were also blamed for the 1993 killing of Sri Lankan president

Ranasinghe Premadasa and the bombing of the central bank which left 90 dead.

They had their own naval unit, the Sea Tigers, and even managed to smuggle in light aircraft and launch the Air Tigers -- an air force capable of hitting as far south as the capital and then returning to jungle airstrips unscathed.

In one of their most audacious attacks, the rebels blew up more than a dozen fighter aircraft at a military base just north of Colombo in 2001 and destroyed six passenger airliners parked at the country's only international airport.

The Tigers had been condemned for their use of suicide bombers and child soldiers, but they had the backing of the international community when Oslo-backed peace talks were under way from 2002.

Those negotiations collapsed and the process ended in January 2008, when President Mahinda Rajapakse

pulled out of a moribund truce.

Government forces entered the city of Kilinochchi -- the LTTE's political headquarters -- in January after the biggest offensive in the history of what had become Asia's longest running ethnic conflict.

In his annual speech in November, Prabhakaran vowed to defend his territory and suggested that the rebels would revert to hit-and-run attacks as their area shrank.

The end came with the last couple of hundred LTTE fighters controlling an area no larger than a football field.

Observers partly attributed the Tigers' spectacular collapse to over-confidence.

'They projected a facade of invincibility,' retired army brigadier general Vipul Boteju told AFP. 'They had also underestimated the military, which had learnt from their mistakes in the past.'

Celebrations in Lanka as news of Prabhakaran's death spreads

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Colombo

LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran's death, bringing down the curtains on his 25-year-old armed struggle for a separate Tamil state, sparked off celebrations in the island nation yesterday.

People poured out into the streets in many towns, setting off firecrackers, waving the national flag and distributing milk rice to mark the military victory.

In Colombo, soon after the announcement of the LTTE leader's death, people were seen setting off firecrackers at street junctions, holding up traffic briefly while youth were seen shaking hands with soldiers on duty at sentry points, DPA reported.

Prabhakaran was killed while trying to escape the

battle zone in the island's north along with two of his top aides.

Prabhakaran, 54, was in a convoy of a van and an ambulance with Pottu Amman, head of the intelligence wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and Sea Tigers chief Soosai when the military opened fire in an isolated strip of Mullaitivu district.

Prabhakaran's death comes shortly after soldiers stumbled upon the bodies of several key LTTE leaders, including his son Charles Anthony, who headed the group's IT wing and was being groomed to take over his father's mantle.

Chandima Perera, a bank executive, told Daily News in Pannipitiya area here that it was a very happy day.

Prabhakaran: The heart of struggle for Tamil eelam

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, who has been reported killed, was feted as a 'Sun God' by his supporters and branded as a ruthless megalomaniac by his opponents.

Few dispute he was one of the most effective guerrilla leaders in modern warfare -- displaying the tactical prowess of Afghanistan's Ahmad Shah Masoud, the ruthlessness of Osama bin Laden and the conviction of Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara.

In three decades of savage ethnic conflict aimed at carving out a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east, Prabhakaran managed to consolidate a de facto state and -- until now -- outsmart successive government offensives.

He terrorised the island and even neighbouring pow-



erhouse India, perfecting the recruitment and use of suicide bomber units before al-Qaeda existed.

His fighters usually took no prisoners, and were notorious for assaults that often left every single enemy soldier dead.

He was held responsible for ordering the 1991 assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi, who in 1987 sent Indian troops to disarm the Tamil Tigers but ended up withdrawing his troops after years of jungle combat.

All top LTTE leaders dead

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's military declared a final victory Monday in its decades-old conflict with the Tamil Tigers, with the rebel outfit's entire leadership wiped out.

Following are brief profiles of the top rebels killed in the final battle:

Velupillai Prabhakaran: The founder and leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Prabhakaran has been living underground since 1972 and built up what was once considered one of the world's most disciplined rebel outfits.

He was killed while trying to make a last dash for freedom through government lines in a two-vehicle convoy, but was ambushed by army commandos, according to the army.

Colonel Soosai:

The leader of the Sea Tigers, the LTTE's naval wing, Soosai was considered to be among Prabhakaran's top military strategists -- responsible for planning suicide attacks using boats and scuba divers, as well as ensuring the arrival of smuggled weapons by speed-



PHOTO: AFP

This file picture taken on August 25, 2004 shows the chief truce monitor retired Norwegian army general Trond Furuhoide (L), being introduced to Tamil Tiger naval unit chief Soosai (C) in the rebel-held northern Sri Lankan town of Kilinochchi while Tiger political wing leader SP Thamilselvan (R) looks on.

boat.

He was killed along with his leader.

Pottu Amman:

The LTTE's ruthless intelligence chief, Amman was seen as another top rebel military planner -- looking for potential targets for suicide bombers, among them presidents, generals and ministers, and identifying and eliminating any dissent within the organisation. He was also wanted by

India in connection with the 1991 assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi.

He was reported killed during Prabhakaran's last desperate escape bid.

Charles Anthony:

Prabhakaran's 24-year-old son and the head of the LTTE's information technology wing. It was widely believed that he was being groomed to take over the leadership of the rebel outfit in the event of his

father's death. His body was found in a patch of jungle where the rebels made their last stand.

B Nadesan:

The LTTE's political wing leader, Nadesan was a former head of the Tigers' police force. He was named as political chief in 2007 following the death of S.P. Thamilselvan, a pro-peace talks moderate who was killed in a government air raid.

Nadesan was also reported to have died in the final showdown with government forces, along with his wife.

S Pulideevan

Head of the LTTE's defunct Peace Secretariat, Pulideevan was for many years the public and moderate face of the ruthless rebel outfit, responsible for dealing with the press, humanitarian aid agencies and foreign diplomats involved in peace efforts.

In the hours before his death along with the last group of LTTE fighters and leaders, Pulideevan was said to have been making frantic calls on a satellite telephone with appeals to be evacuated by the Red Cross or United Nations.

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