

Aid agencies challenge Lanka over war victims

AFP, Colombo

International aid agencies and the United Nations yesterday pushed Sri Lanka to allow desperately needed help to be rushed to displaced civilians now that the fighting against Tamil rebels is over.

The government has severely restricted access to hundreds of thousands of non-combatants who managed to escape the fighting in the northeast, despite widespread fears of a deepening humanitarian crisis.

Men, women and children waded through swamps as they fled the savage final battles between the government troops and the Tamil Tigers in a small sliver of coastal jungle.

Carrying no more than a few bundles of clothes and at risk of being shot or shelled by either side, they escaped the violence only to be herded into spartan, state-run camps where they await screening by the authorities.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said

the government urgently needed to allocate more land for emergency shelter, water and sanitation facilities for the 265,000 people who fled the fighting in recent months.

UNHCR complained its access to civilian camps in the district of Vavuniya had recently been "greatly curtailed" and warned another exodus of tens of thousands of people was expected in the coming days.

The agency plans to erect 10,000 more shelters to accommodate the Tamil refugees and said Sri Lanka must take immediate steps to improve conditions at 42 existing sites.

Since fighting ended on Monday, the government has come under renewed pressure to drop all restrictions imposed on aid groups and to lead a massive programme to get help to the victims of the war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, the only neutral organisation that was working in the conflict zone, said

the military's final assault had halted its access to civilians in desperate straits.

"No humanitarian aid has reached those who need it for over a week," director Pierre Kraehenbuehl said.

"Under international humanitarian law, the lives of all those who are not or are no longer fighting must be spared," he added in response to fears of a wave of killings after hostilities ceased.

Much of the north and east of Sri Lanka has been off-limits for years to aid workers, international observers and journalists -- leaving few independent accounts of the devastation wrought by the war.

Despite its victory, the government is expected to keep many restrictions in place especially as the UN has called for an independent war crimes probe.

A spokesman for the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights said last week an investigation into possible war crimes was vital, stressing there had to be "accountability for what has gone on in Sri Lanka."



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan Defence Ministry photo released on Monday shows troops walking amongst debris inside the war zone, when they helped evacuate the last of the Tamil civilians from the area.



Tamil protest in London turns violent

AFP, London

A protest outside Britain's parliament turned violent early Tuesday as relief agencies and governments called for urgent humanitarian aid after Sri Lanka announced defeat for Tamil Tiger rebels.

As Sri Lankan television broadcast footage of what it said was the body of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the founder and chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was reportedly shot dead Monday by the Sri Lankan army, possibly bringing a final blow to the rebel group just one day after conceding defeat in one of Asia's longest-running wars.

The clashes broke out when police moved to disperse 2,500 Tamils who staged a sit-down outside parliament, with Scotland Yard claiming another 21 officers received minor injuries.

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Prabhakaran is believed to have been killed while escaping the war zone in the northeast of the island in an ambulance.

Prabhakaran founded the LTTE in the

1970s in response to discrimination against Tamils by the island's majority Sinhalese population.

For nearly three decades, his group waged war with the Sri Lankan army to achieve a separate homeland for Tamils or Tamil Eelam in the north and east of the island. To achieve this goal, he developed a well-trained militia cadre, naval wing, and an air force comprising of rudimentary light aircrafts, becoming the only armed separatist group in the world to have all three military wings.

The LTTE, which is considered a terrorist group by 32 countries, has committed hundreds of suicide bombings.

It has also carried out assassinations of high-profile politicians that got in its way, including former President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993 and former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi 1991. The LTTE targeted Rajiv Gandhi for his sending Indian troops for peace efforts in 1987 that eventually engaged in open conflict with the rebels.

Supporters of Prabhakaran have praised his dedication to the cause. During peace

talks in the 1990s and in 2002 he refused to negotiate for anything less than a homeland.

But Prabhakaran has been accused by the government of using the lull period of peace talks to augment his military capabilities, a claim also made by his former lieutenant, Vinayagamoothri Muralitharan, known as Col. Karuna Amman, who later defected to the government side.

But after the peace process broke down in 2006, President Mahinda Rajapakse made annihilating Tamil Tiger rebels its priority. He hiked the island's military budget to \$1.7 billion for the 2009 fiscal year, nearly 5 percent of the gross domestic product. He also intensified recruitment of soldiers across the island and re-recruited war deserters by granting them amnesty if they returned to the frontlines.

Rajapakse claimed his actions were necessary given his enemy was one of the world's fiercest armed separatist group.

Can Tigers carry on without Prabhakaran?

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, Pune

Velupillai Prabhakaran, the founder and chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was reportedly shot dead Monday by the Sri Lankan army, possibly bringing a final blow to the rebel group just one day after conceding defeat in one of Asia's longest-running wars.

For decades the charismatic leader played an instrumental role in demanding a separate homeland for the island's ethnic Tamil minority and in building up the LTTE's military capabilities.

"(Prabhakaran) was the LTTE's supreme leader, its god, its icon. Minus him, the LTTE will never be its old self," says Narayan Swamy, the New Delhi-based author of a biography of the rebel leader, "Inside an Elusive Mind."

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Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil Tigers

The government says its forces have taken the last territory held by rebels, ending a conflict that lasted decades and left 70,000 people dead

A history of conflict	
1971	Marxist revolts
1972	Name changed from Ceylon to Sri Lanka; Tamil Tiger rebel group formed
1973	Jaffna
1974	Kilinochchi
1975	Vavuniya
1976	SRI LANKA
1977	COLOMBO
1978	AFP 180509
2006	February
2007	Peace talks fail in Switzerland
2008	November
2009	Head of the Tigers' political wing killed in an army attack
2010	January
2011	Government withdraws from ceasefire agreement. Launches offensive
2012	2 January
2013	The army captures the Tigers' political capital Kilinochchi
2014	20 April
2015	Thousands of civilians trapped by the conflict flee war zone
2016	17 May
2017	Tigers admit defeat
2018	18 May
2019	Government declares final victory

Failure to compromise led to Prabhakaran's demise

LUKE HARDING, The Guardian Online

The green fatigues had vanished, the trademark cyanide capsule had been discreetly tucked away and after 20 years of ruthlessly eliminating his enemies Velupillai Prabhakaran was giving a rare press conference his last as it turned out.

It was 10 April 2002. The vicious seesaw war that had convulsed Sri Lanka since 1983 was enjoying a brief lull. I had driven into the Tamil Tigers' normally forbidden northern stronghold, along a rough dirt track and past lagoons filled with pink lilies and teak trees.

I, and about 200 other journalists, had been summoned to witness what was apparently a major historical event: the end of the Tamil Tigers' violent struggle against the Sri Lankan government, and one of the world's most

intractable conflicts.

We waited for 10 hours. Tamil Tiger guards carried out the most severe security checks I have ever encountered, confiscating satellite phones and searching my ears. Finally Prabhakaran emerged from the jungle, where he had spent the last 12 years in hiding, dodging assassination.

In the flesh the legendary guerrilla leader looked surprisingly well-fed, tanned even.

Instead of a military uniform he was wearing a clean civilian shirt, a hint that his days of revolutionary mayhem were perhaps over.

Prabhakaran's message was conciliatory: he said his Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were considering abandoning their armed struggle. They were prepared to compromise with Sri Lanka's ethnic Sinhalese leadership a historic step.

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