

Sri Lanka launches offensive. (1995, October 23) *The Globe and mail.*

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After the massacre, a formerly militant Tamil leader Douglas Devananda, who is now a member of parliament and was the target of a rebel assassination attempt last month, issued a scathing criticism.

"The LTTE has in the past resorted to attempts of inflaming communal clashes," he said. "They are engaged in the same move at present."

Government representatives said that although Friday's attacks had destroyed 155,000 tonnes of crude oil and petroleum — about 20 per cent of the nation's oil stocks — the loss would not impede a major offensive against the rebels launched last Tuesday.

The military continued to push into Tamil Tiger territory over the weekend in a major jungle battle that it said left 106 Tigers dead, bringing the rebel death toll to 350 in a week. There is no way to confirm the reports as all civilian communication with northern Sri Lanka has been cut off.

The army said 76 government troops had been killed and 243 wounded in the first six days of fighting.

"They [the Tamil Tigers] can't face the army in Jaffna," military spokesman Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe told a news conference yesterday in Colombo. "They have gone back to their tactic of resorting to attacks on civilians in the east and in Colombo."

Although Tamil resentment had been growing for decades, the civil war erupted in 1983 when the Tigers massacred 13 Sinhalese soldiers, provoking anti-Tamil riots throughout the country.

Some analysts believe Saturday's attacks on civilians were designed to reignite ethnic tension, which in the past has encouraged Tamil civilians to support the rebel cause for a separate state. The massacres all occurred in resettlement areas, where the government over the past decade has moved thousands of Sinhalese "pioneers" to develop new farmland in formerly Tamil-dominated areas.

Even members of mainstream Tamil political parties have criticized the government for trying to assimilate the east. The government has offered sweeping constitutional changes that would grant a semi-autonomous status to the east and north, where Tamils comprise an ethnic majority.

Many Tamils, who account for three million of Sri Lanka's population of 17 million, say they are discriminated against in both education and government jobs.

The military said yesterday it had captured a rebel-held hospital at Achchelu, eight kilometres from Jaffna, the main Tamil town in the north. "Our intention is to dominate the entire peninsula," Brig. Munasinghe said. "The LTTE can't stop us going to Jaffna. We're going to liberate the people from the clutches of the LTTE."

As a massive military force of 35,000 personnel, backed by tanks and ground-assault aircraft, continued its offensive against the Tiger stronghold of Jaffna, military officials said they expect the rebels to launch more counterattacks in other parts of the country to divert the government's attention. The military is believed to have moved

half its forces from the volatile eastern province to the north for the big offensive.

If the Tigers have indeed engaged in a diversionary war, some analysts believe it shows how weakened their main force has become. "The Tigers are very much short of fighters," said M. R. Narayan Swamy, an Indian-based author on the conflict.

Although no official numbers are published, the LTTE is reported to have 10,000 to 15,000 trained fighters.

The LTTE's clandestine radio yesterday called on parents to enlist their children in the war effort. "To save the land, we need reinforcements," the Tamil broadcast, monitored in Colombo, said.

A recent issue of the LTTE's magazine also appealed to overseas Tamils to increase donations to the war effort, saying another \$20-million (U.S.) would be needed to stop the Sri Lankan military's long-awaited offensive.

In a rare admission of distress, the publication said "our young have not understood the importance of our emergency appeals" — a possible indication the LTTE's recent recruitment drives have failed to draw enough new fighters.

Constant bombing and shelling by Sri Lankan troops had led to a "drastic drop in recruitment age and high pressure on girls to join" said the LTTE, according to a report last year by University Teachers for Human Rights, a Sri Lankan non-governmental organization. The report said one-quarter of the Tamil Tigers' new fighters were women.