

Sri Lanka allows aid effort for thousands of refugees. (1995, November 03) *The Ottawa citizen.*

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WORLD

Sri Lanka allows aid effort for thousands of refugees

TAMILS STRANDED: About 400,000 are without food or homes after they fled a government offensive, only to be hit by monsoons in the refugee camps.

The Guardian

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka gave permission for an international relief effort for tens of thousands of Tamil refugees marooned in monsoon storms. They were left without food or shelter after fleeing a government onslaught on the northern Jaffna peninsula.

As many as 400,000 hungry and terrified people are believed to have fled the advancing government troops — meaning nearly two-thirds of the peninsula's population is on the move.

Officials and aid workers have described scenes of utter misery, with elderly men, women and children pouring out of Jaffna on foot and in carts towards the east. An acute shortage of medicines, coupled with the arrival of the monsoon, means there is a serious threat of disease in the makeshift and overcrowded camps.

"We want to send urgent medical supplies, food and other essentials. Some people are said to be sleeping under trees," a government official said Thursday.

Britain's Save the Children, the United States agency Care, and the International Committee for the Red Cross are to be allowed to distribute plastic

sheeting, food and medicine around Chavakachcheri, an area still in rebel hands.

The relief effort will be the first in territory held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam since Operation Sunshine was launched on Oct. 17.

But it comes amid signs that Chavakachcheri is but a way station on a larger Tamil exodus.

Aid workers said Tiger guerrillas were hijacking fishing vessels to take the refugees from Chavakachcheri, about 20 kilometres from Jaffna town on the eastern edge of the peninsula, to the Killinochi area on the mainland. Killinochi also remains under Tiger control.

But in the two-week assault on the Tamil Tiger mini-state, the most sustained and punishing onslaught on the rebels in 12 years of war, Jaffna is the ultimate prize, not so much for its military importance, but as a symbol of Tamil independence.

The military claimed that nearly 1,000 Tigers had been killed and 3,000 wounded during the offensive, against its own losses of 220 dead and nearly 540 injured. The figures could not be independently confirmed, though the Tiger estimate of losses is lower.

Without Jaffna, the Tigers' claims to rule a de facto homeland will crumble. But while government forces had punched their way to within six kilometres of the now largely deserted town, they did not appear to be advancing.