

Thousands flee new Tiger bombardment. (1999, November 10). *The South China morning post.*

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SRI LANKA

## Thousands flee new Tiger bombardment

SUSANNAH PRICE and AGENCIES in Colombo

Thousands of villagers are fleeing their homes in the northeast of the country to escape a renewed offensive by Tamil Tiger separatists.

More than 9,000 civilians have arrived in the town of Padawiya, about 30km east of the main highway, and are staying in schools and other larger buildings.

The exodus comes after the Tigers recaptured large areas of land from the army during the past week. Many refugees are said to be from the majority Sinhalese community who had been resettled in Tamil areas.

The Government says aid is being provided for the displaced.

"Tell the President to come and see our plight," said B. G. Senehewathie in Padawiya, surrounded by dozens of other refugees who shouted complaints about the Government.

"The President has been saying she would provide a solution and has been saying so for so many years, but nothing has happened," Ms Senehewathie said.

Meanwhile, the Defence Ministry said the rebels used artillery close to villages in the Weli Oya region on Monday, killing five soldiers and forcing villagers to run.

The military mounted a counter offensive and killed five guerillas and recovered their weapons and

ammunition, the ministry said.

Officials said the army had withdrawn from its camp at Gajabapura because of shelling, while the Tigers said from their London office that their fighters had captured two more army camps in the region.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has urged both sides to ensure the safety of those wounded and captured in the fighting.

"Generally we have not seen prisoners of war taken in this conflict," Red Cross spokesman Harsha Gunewardene said.

The Nobel prize-winning Medecins Sans Frontieres has said indiscriminate attacks by the Tigers and the army during the fighting had injured and killed civilians.

It reported that seven people died last week when a Sri Lankan air force jet bombed a village in the Tiger-held Mullaitivu district.

Aid agencies have also expressed concern about decreasing supplies of food and medicine in Tiger-controlled areas. Safe passage for supplies is usually agreed by both sides.

The current crossing point, at the key crossroads at Mankulam, took several weeks of long discussions through the Red Cross to establish. But Mankulam was captured by the Tigers on Friday and is now several kilometres inside their area of control.

In her first comments on the renewed fighting, President Chandrika Kumaratunga admitted the army had lost control of four key towns.

She said she had ordered changes to be made at various levels in the army. She also accused journalists of misreporting the number of dead and wounded.