

Trial and terror – that's life in Jaffna today. (1993, November 05) *Daily News*.

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(By Minoli de Soysa)

JAFFNA, Sri Lanka, Thursday (Reuter) – For more than three years, 800,000 people (this figure is contested on the basis of population exodus) in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula have lived without power, communications, postal service or transport, dependent on food ships and crushed by inflation.

Jaffna town, once a bustling place, is reduced to pot-holed streets lined with bullet-scarred and crumbling buildings. The only forms of transport, except for jeeps and trucks used by the Tamil rebel leaders, are bicycles and hand-driven tractors.

Residents are trapped between shells and bombs and a rigid rebel regime that tolerates no criticism.

"We are between the devil and the deep blue sea," said one resident, who asked not to be identified.

The Jaffna peninsula is controlled by the Libera-

tion Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who have been waging a 10-year-old war to set up a homeland in the north and east for the minority Tamil community. The town is their main stronghold.

"We have no freedom to say anything. We can't do what we want," a farmer confided to journalists on the street.

Newspapers operate on a basis of self-censorship. They offer no criticism of the Tigers, who have their own paper as well as a radio and television station.

Monthly news bulletins chronicle rebel victories and military atrocities and regularly feature rebel leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, a great source of inspiration especially to the group's Black Tiger suicide squads.

"We are fighting against so many forces. We are a military organisation, and can't be compared to the government. We have to take serious action against

those who take information to our enemies," says Tiger spokesman Anton Balasingham.

International human rights groups have accused the Tigers of arresting, torturing and executing critics. They are said to demand money from citizens and force young people to join the movement.

"Upholding law and order and human rights in this situation is very difficult," Balasingham said, denying that there was forcible recruitment.

He said the civil administration was working now, with a police force and a court system in place. "We have made mistakes but now we are trying to improve and reform ourselves."

After the military sealed off land routes to the peninsula last year, residents have been effectively cut off from the rest of Sri Lanka. Each time civilians want to travel to the mainland, they risk losing their

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